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Referee Programs

2009 Referee Week in Review - Week 12



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 12 – ending June 7, 2009

WEEK OVERVIEW

The weekend of competition included the usual slate of MLS, WPS and USL games but also included the additional excitement provided by World Cup qualification matches. Referees were required to utilize all their tools to ensure that the games offered spectators entertainment without jeopardizing the safety of the players.

Four red cards were issued this past weekend. Two of the send offs resulted from a player receiving his second cautionable offense in the game and one was after a player had been substituted from the game and left the field of play. Game flow continues to improve and the number of fouls called this past weekend was relatively low, with an average of 24 fouls called per match.

This “Week In Review” will feature two decisions from MLS games and an interesting penalty kick decision from a WPS match. One of the MLS decisions that we will examine involves an offside decision (that was not flagged but leads to an invalid goal) that was miscalculated by an assistant referee (AR) that contains many interesting educational points relating to Law 11 – Offside.

WEEK 12 COMMENTARY

Making Penalty Kick Calls With Conviction – Law 14

Whistling a decision is often times the easiest part of making a decision. Demonstrating conviction when making these calls can make a difference how players react to the call. Demonstrating conviction encompasses many items.

How does a referee demonstrate conviction? Much is determined by how he executes his personality. Here are two of the key techniques referees can call upon in this process:

- **Positioning**

Closeness to a decision through strategic positioning. The closer a referee is to a decision, the less dissent that is likely to occur because players cannot question the official's view of the call. There is an age old officiating adage that “presence lends to conviction.” When a player who has committed a foul or who is claiming that he was fouled looks up and the first thing he sees is the referee, he is forced to reconsider his actions and temper his claims.

- **Personality and Presence**

Mannerisms and how body language are used to demonstrate to others that the decision is correct. This includes the ability to use a strong presence through convincing signals, stature and the ability to use your personal skills and techniques to enhance your presence. The controlled use of one's arms, hands and voice are all key factors in using personality to demonstrate conviction.

Typically, the more game critical the decision, the more conviction that is required to “sell” the decision. For decisions like penalty kicks and red cards, match officials need to make calls with conviction due to their potential impact on the game.

Video Clip 1: Washington at Los Angeles Sol – WPS (58:45)

At first glance, this looks like an innocent shot at goal gone wide. A well positioned referee will be able to see what happens just prior to the ball going wide over the end line. Watch the entire video clip. A penalty kick decision that is initially confusing becomes reality only thanks to a replay. A defender handles the ball, within the penalty area, prior to its leaving the field of play.

In cases of hidden identity or calls that are not obvious at first glance, the referee must do something additional to help others see what the referee has seen. As you review the video clip, ask yourself: “As a referee, how can I better demonstrate this decision since it is not seemingly evident?” Consider **personality** and consider how you can enhance your **presence** to make the decision more obvious.

In this clip, one of the options for the referee is to exhibit urgency by sprinting to a neutral area (if he believes the decision will result in dissent) while pointing to the penalty spot to indicate a penalty kick has been awarded. Once stationed away from potential dissenting players, the referee can visually show the decision by using hand/arm gestures. A simple visual indication using one hand to motion to the other arm to show a handball may be very effective. This simple motion will communicate to players, coaches, spectators and media that the referee has awarded a penalty kick for a handling offence by the defensive team.

Visual gestures to indicate the type of fouls called are not normally recommended. However, in cases of hidden identity and in cases where a decision may be game critical, the referee may consider some visual gesture to enhance his communication.

It is important to note that despite the fact that the ball is clearly going to miss the goal and the handling offense occurs just as the ball is leaving the field, the referee's hands are tied. The referee must call the foul and award a penalty kick because one of the 10 offences for which a direct free kick is awarded is committed by the defending team in its own penalty area while the ball is in play.

Offside Goal: Gaining an Advantage – Law 11

Law 11 – Offside, provides three ways in which offside players can be declared offside (remember, it is not an offense to be in an offside position):

1. **Interfering with play**
An offside positioned player plays or touches the ball that has last been passed or touched by a team mate.
2. **Interfering with an opponent**
An offside positioned player prevents an opponent from playing or being able to play the ball by clearly obstructing the opponent's line of vision or movements or making a gesture or movement which, in the opinion of the referee, deceives or distracts an opponent.
3. **Gaining an advantage by being in that position**
An offside player plays a ball that rebounds to him off a goalpost or the crossbar having been in an offside position or playing a ball that rebounds to him off an opponent having been in an offside position.

Given that it is permissible for a player to be in an offside position (offside positioned players are only penalized when one of the three criteria take place), it is critical that ARs be able to consider the three aforementioned criteria. In fact, ARs must be able to evaluate multiples of the criteria at once. In close spaces, many different players may actually play/touch a ball. Each of these plays/touches then creates a new phase of play in which the AR must evaluate the actions of the offside player. Consequently, ARs need to take "snapshots" of player positions and keep that shot in their databank until a new phase of play begins and then disengage from the prior snapshot.

Video Clip 2: Los Angeles Galaxy at Toronto (61:30)

This clip involves three separate phases of play and, thus, the AR is required to take three separate snapshots of player positions and then must use those snapshots to make a decision whether an offside player should be declared offside or not. Let us evaluate each phase of play:

- Phase 1:
There is a service/pass into the penalty area. At the time of this service, the AR must take his first snapshot. That picture should show three attackers (red shirts) in a position to participate on the receiving end of the pass. The AR must hold his flag until it is clear who "interferes with play" by touching or playing the ball. In this phase, an **onside player** heads the ball forward; hence, there is no offside decision.
- Phase 2:
The next snapshot occurs immediately at the time of the attacker's head ball. This frozen picture will have a wide attacker moving toward the goal in an offside position. Once again, the AR may not flag offside until one of the three offside criteria are met. The header rebounds off the goalpost. The wide attacker, although in an offside position, has not satisfied any of the criteria to be declared offside. Hence, the flag should remain down.
- Phase 3:
After the ball rebounds off the goalpost, an attacker shoots the ball toward the goal; the third snapshot that must be taken and the fact that another attacker plays the ball signifies a new phase of play. Note in this snapshot the wide attacker is still in an offside position. The shot rebounds off the goalkeeper. This does **not** start a new phase as the ball was not played by an attacker. After the ball rebounds off the goalkeeper, it is played (headed) by the offside positioned attacker. Since this attacker was in an offside position at the time the third phase of play was initiated he must be declared offside as he "gained an advantage from being in an offside position." The fact the ball rebounded off the goalpost is irrelevant based upon the "gaining an advantage from being in that position" definition in the Laws of the Game.

In summary, the player who scores the goal should be **declared offside** as he "gained an advantage from his offside position." The AR must recall the phase 3 snapshot taken at the time of the shot on goal. Using this picture, the AR should recognize that the wide attacker is in an offside position. Once this player plays/touches the ball, he has "gained an advantage" even though the ball rebounded off the post.

As we can see, taking multiple snapshots and making multiple decisions in a span of seconds is critical to correct offside decision making.

Violent Conduct: Law 12

Services or passes into the penalty area continue to lend themselves to players taking liberties by fouling opponents or by slowing opponents down. The mere knowledge that players will always be jostling for an advantageous attacking or defending position when balls are crossed into the penalty area should be a warning sign to match officials. To get the edge or advantage, players may commit fouls off the ball that may go undetected by officials if they do not heed the warnings or read the play by understanding the tactics used by both attackers and defenders.

Not all contact is a foul regardless where it occurs on the field of play. Match officials must use their understanding of the game ("feel") to differentiate contact that needs to be sanctioned and that which is inconsequential or minor/soft/trifling. This is especially the case when there is a service or pass into the penalty area. Use of hands and arms to slow an opponent is a regular practice. If the referee believes the use of

the hand or arm was “careless” and provided an advantage for the attacker or defender, then the referee must whistle a foul.

Preventative work by officials will always assist in reducing the amount of contact and may prevent a penalty kick from being awarded or from a goal being disallowed for a foul. From restarts, referees are encouraged to prevent the ball from being played if there is unnecessary jostling and holding occurring. The referee should then send a strong message to the player(s) that such conduct will not be tolerated.

Referees need to watch not only the ultimate destination for the ball but they need to observe the movement off the ball and leading up to the ball. Heightened awareness at times like these will lead to the referee catching critical offences committed off the ball.

Video Clip 3: [Columbus at Kansas City \(50:10\)](#)

A ball is passed from the right side into the penalty area and toward the near post. Three players (the goalkeeper and one player from each team) challenge for a ball in the air. Approximately five yards behind the aerial challenge is another attacker who is jostling for position with a defender. The defender is making contact with the attacker but the referee judges that the contact is inconsequential and minor and does not prevent the attacker from making a play since the ball is not in his vicinity.

The attacker, in an attempt to make space for himself, knees the opponent. The referee is able to see the use of excessive force because he has not focused solely on the aerial challenge for the ball. Knowing that crosses into the penalty area can cause problems, the referee has widened his scope of vision so he can see off the ball incidents.

The referee correctly red cards the attacker for violent conduct. Violent conduct because, although the ball was in play, there was no challenge for the ball.

Looking Forward – Week 13

Assistant referees should continue to stay focused for the entire 90 minutes, plus additional time. This includes times when an ARs mind may have a tendency to be resting or relaxing due to the play being on the other side of the field. ARs need to find ways to challenge themselves to keep sharp during downtime (talking to ones self and watching behind the referee’s back) and sprinting all balls to the goal line or to the goalkeeper are excellent methods for keeping the mind and body active. Another good tool is to think about the game as the referee and, without ball watching, get a feel for the referee’s rhythm and the manner in which he is calling the game. Think about players, matchups and team tactics and prepare yourself to incorporate preventative measures into your work for the balance of the match.

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