



ussoccer.com

Close

## Referee Programs

**2009 Referee Week in Review - Week 3**

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 3 – ending April 5, 2009****WEEK 3 OVERVIEW**

Last week's "Week In Review" stressed the importance of regularly reviewing the U.S. Soccer Referee Program Directives for 2009 to ensure familiarity and to assist in making the criteria contained in each of the 10 directives "second nature." During the eight games this week, the same was true as the competitive nature of the matches was evident and referees faced even more challenging decisions. As you will read below, "Contact Above the Shoulder" was a focal point and required match officials to mentally evaluate the established criteria to identify contact in the facial region that should result in a red card being issued.

Here is a summary of game performance for week 3:

Fouls: 181  
 Average per game: 22.63  
 Yellow cards: 26  
 Average per game: 3.25  
 Red cards: 4  
 Average per game: 0.5  
 Goals: 22  
 Average per game: 2.75

**WEEK 3 COMMENTARY****Contact Above the Shoulder: Law 12**

Due to the work by officials to eliminate tackles from behind, players have been forced to find other methods to slow opponents and to send messages or intimidate. The use of the arm, forearm or hand to foul opponents has replaced the tackle from behind. In particular, the use of these items as a weapon in aerial challenges has increased. Due to the speed and athleticism that is a characteristic of the modern game, contact with the arm/forearm/elbow/hand (a hard, solid surface) with any part of the opponent's body above the shoulders (soft tissue areas) makes the incident much more dangerous. The speed at which many of the aerial challenges are committed increases the force and severity of the contact and, therefore, often translates into excessive force which increases the possibility that the opponent's safety is endangered. Should the referee believe that excessive force is used in a challenge, a red card would be mandated.

The 2009 Directive on "Contact Above the Shoulder" provides a framework for officials to use in deciphering challenges near the neck and facial region. Key is the referee's ability to differentiate between the use of the arm/forearm/elbow/hand as a "tool" or as a "weapon." The following table will assist match officials with interpreting whether the use of the arm/forearm/elbow/hand is fair, careless, reckless or excessive force.

**TOOL**

- Arm used for balance
- Normal body movement
- No swing of the arm INTO the opponent
- Opponent into arm/elbow/hand – not arm/elbow/hand into opponent
- Arm/elbow was out before the challenge was initiated
- Not UP and IN – just UP

**WEAPON**

- Excessive force used
- Safety of the player is endangered
- Hard surface (forearm/elbow/hand) contacting soft surface (facial and neck region)
- Arm/elbow UP and IN to opponent
- Arm/elbow/hand is swung toward opponent's facial region
- UP and IN – arm used as a "battering ram"
- Injury results

When the arm/forearm/elbow/hand is used as a "weapon" as described above, the referee is required to issue a red card. The more it is used as a "tool," the referee should consider a foul and/or a yellow card. Officials should thoroughly review the 2009 Directive "Contact Above the Shoulder" referenced above.

**Video Clip 1: New York at Chicago (47:32, second half)**

Using the “tool” versus “weapon” criteria, it is clear that the player in the white jersey uses his elbow as a “weapon.” The aerial challenge is committed with excessive force and endangers the opponent’s safety. Consequently, the player on New York (white jerseys) should be sent off for serious foul play. Watch as the player runs at the opponent with speed thereby increasing the force and severity of the aerial challenge.

The assistant referee (AR) should provide assistance with indicating the severity of the foul. The AR has a clear view of the incident which is 100% misconduct (red card). The referee team needs to get this call correct for the good of the game.

Using the “weapon” criteria above, the follow warning signs should be recognized by match officials:

- **Excessive force is used**  
The speed of the run toward the opponent increases the force and severity of the challenge thereby endangering the safety of the opponent.
- **Hard surface (forearm/elbow/hand) contacting a soft surface**  
The elbow is used to contact the facial region of the opponent which increases the risk of injury and the seriousness of foul.
- **Arm/elbow UP and IN to opponent – leads with the arm**  
The New York player leaps/jumps into the opponent and initiates the contact. The elbow is used as a weapon and is raised above shoulder level. This is not a natural position. Watch the player’s head and eyes. Neither is focused on playing the ball.
- **Arm/elbow/hand is swung toward opponent’s facial region**  
The New York player cocks his arm and elbow and swings it into the opponent’s face as he leaps.
- **Location of the ball**  
There is no opportunity for the New York player to play the ball based upon his angle of challenge and the location of the ball as contact is made with the opponent. It is a late and uncontrolled challenge.

Recognizing similar warning signs, referees must issue a red card to players who use their arms as weapons. At times, these fouls are not easily recognized as players work hard to disguise them. Frequently, referees tend to concentrate on fouls committed by the feet or legs and may miss upper body fouls.

**Video Clip 2: Dallas at New England (33:21)**

This clip also involves use of the arm as a “weapon.” As you watch the clip, use the criteria to evaluate the manner in which the contact with the goalkeeper is initiated. Additionally, the result of the contact (injury to the goalkeeper) should be considered as one of the identified warning signs that the contact exceeded the force needed to make a fair challenge for the ball.

The referee’s ability to recognize the subtleness of the foul and the factors that make the challenge fall in the “weapon” category is paramount. First, the referee must be positioned to have a clear view of the New England player (dark blue jersey) so that he can see that this player turns his upper body and elbow area in to the goalkeeper’s facial region. This indicates a deliberate act to make contact and intimidate the opponent.

Secondly, the tardiness of the contact must be recognized. The New England player had every opportunity to avoid the contact and change the direction of his run or his body. Contact is made well after the goalkeeper has possession of the ball. This player makes no attempt to avoid the contact because he knows that he will be protected by the hard surface area of his arm. The player attempts to disguise his challenge by his innocent reaction.

Note the player’s eyes. There is no focus to play the ball. The New England player seems to “line up” the goalkeeper just prior to the contact.

Finally, the referee should consider the result of the contact – injury to the keeper. Because an injury results, there is downtime that can be used by the referee team to get the decision correct. As the goalkeeper is tended to by the medical staff, the referee can consult with the other officials and get their assessment of the foul.

This challenge is done to intimidate the goalkeeper and meets the criteria for using the arm/forearm/elbow/hand as a “weapon.” Hence, a red card for serious foul play should be issued.

**Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity: Law 12**

The Laws of the Game (Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct) require referees to send off players who deny an obvious goal scoring opportunity (DOGSO). U.S. Soccer has established the “4 D Criteria” to evaluate whether a foul meets the DOGSO definition and should result in a red card being issued. The following is a summary of the “4 D Criteria:”

- **Distance to goal**  
The distance between the offence and the goal must be considered. The closer to goal, the increased likelihood of the existence of a goal scoring opportunity.
- **Distance to ball**  
Attackers who have clear possession of the ball are more likely to have an obvious goal scoring opportunity. However, referees must “feel” the situation and consider that the Laws of the Game also require the referee to evaluate the “likelihood of keeping or gaining possession of the ball.” In other words, the referee may consider the fact that an attacker, not in possession of the ball, was clearly denied the opportunity to gain possession of the ball by an opponent and this denial resulted in an obvious goal scoring opportunity being denied.
- **Defender position/location and number**  
The location of and number of defenders involved in the scoring opportunity is an important factor. The closer the defender(s) are to the opponent with the ball, the increased opportunity they have to prevent a scoring opportunity. Additionally, the position or location of these defenders is an important component. A defender may be in front of the ball yet he may be positioned such that he cannot prevent the scoring opportunity. In this case, the referee may decide that this defender has no influence on the potential outcome and still consider an obvious goal scoring opportunity exists.
- **Direction to goal**  
The direction the attacker is taking toward the goal must be considered. Attackers in the center of the field moving directly to goal have a better chance to score than an attacker moving/dribbling away from the goalmouth.

Remember, the offence that denies an opponent an obvious goal scoring opportunity may result in either a direct free kick (ex: tripping) or indirect free kick (ex: obstructing an opponent). In either case, the offender must be red carded for "denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity to an opponent moving toward the player's goal by an offence punishable by a free kick or penalty kick."

**Video Clip 3: Seattle at Toronto (86:00)**

This is a DOGSO situation that is created by the referee missing an initial foul (handling the ball by the attacker who is substantially denied a goal scoring opportunity). A wider angle of vision by the referee should provide a better perspective of the initial handling offense. This is particularly important on quick counter attacks. Referees should make their initial movements into a wider position that provides a side view of the play. In this case, the referee's view of the handball may be negatively affected because he is running directly behind the play and attacker, and only has a view of the player's back.

The last defender on Seattle commits a tactical foul to bring the attacker down just outside the penalty area. This situation meets all the "4 D Criteria" that referees should use to evaluate whether DOGSO exists. Despite the fact that the final foul is not a hard challenge, nonetheless, the referee must take action and send the defender off for DOGSO.

**Looking Forward – Week 4**

The fact that two "contact above the shoulder" send offs were missed indicates that further training must occur. This must start with review of the "Contact Above the Shoulder" directive and constant review of video. In addition, pregame discussions amongst the referee team will facilitate quicker apprehension and application. Referee teams are encouraged to take their time in assessing these critical situations so that they are addressed in accordance with the requirements of the directive. "Contact above the shoulder" can result in severe injuries and, therefore, officials must be diligent in their application and recognition.

*ussoccer.com is the official website of U.S. Soccer, the governing body of soccer in the United States*

\*If you are unable to click on the above links, copy and paste this URL into your browser:  
[http://www.ussoccer.com/articles/viewArticle.jsp\\_13828097.html](http://www.ussoccer.com/articles/viewArticle.jsp_13828097.html)

[Top](#)

© Copyright US Soccer Federation 2001-2007. All rights reserved.