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Referee Programs

2009 Referee Week in Review - Week 4

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 4 – ending April 12, 2009****WEEK 4 OVERVIEW**

Week 4 of the MLS season showed a significant increase in the average number of fouls called per game, the average number of yellow cards issued per game and the seven red cards issued. This week, reckless and excessive force tackles were at the forefront of misconduct as were situations involving delaying the restart of play. There were 1.61 additional cautions issued per game this week versus week 3, with six cautions being issued in each of three games. Hence, referees were required to be focused and more diligent in their approach to matches.

Three examples of red card tackles involving excessive force will be the focus of this “Week In Review.” Referees are also encouraged to review “[Week In Review 1](#)” to compare differences between the red card tackles examined below and the yellow card tackles reviewed in the first week of the season.

WEEK 4 COMMENTARY**Excessive Force – Red Card Tackles: Law 12**

U.S. Soccer has established criteria to be used by match officials when evaluating tackles to determine whether a red card is deserved for excessive force. Extensive examination of this criteria (using the acronym “SIAPOA”) can be found in the 2009 U.S. Soccer Referee Program Directive entitled: “[100% Misconduct – Tactical and Red Card Tackles](#).”

As a general overview, referees should use the SIAPOA criteria when determining whether a player committing a tackle should be cautioned for the reckless nature of the challenge or sent off (red carded) because excessive force was used. Remember, the Laws of the Game define using excessive force as “the player has far exceeded the necessary use of force and is in danger of injuring his opponent.” Additionally, the Interpretation of the Laws of the Game and Guidelines for Referees state that “Any player who lunges at an opponent in challenging for the ball from the front, from the side or from behind using one or both legs, with excessive force and endangering the safety of an opponent is guilty of serious foul play.” These are key words that should guide your viewing of the tackles that follow.

Red card tackles usually combine each of or several of the following SIAPOA components:

- **Speed of play and the tackle**
The faster the tackler is moving, the greater the force and likelihood of endangering the safety of the opponent. Additionally, speed also equates to less control of the challenge and the less likely the attacker can cleanly win the ball.
- **Intent**
The intent of the tackler. Was the tackle intended to send a message or to cleanly win the ball
- **Aggressive nature**
Did the tackler lunge for the ball with one or both feet? Consideration should be given to the distance between the attacker and the tackler at the time the tackler leaves his feet. The further the distance, the less control the tackler has of his actions and the less likely the tackler is to play the ball. Are cleats up and exposed to the opponent?
- **Position of the tackler**
In particular, his legs (height of the tackler’s leading leg and the follow-up action by the tackler’s trailing leg).
- **Opportunity to play the ball**
Was the ball within playing distance? Or, was the ball already past the tackler at the time the tackler’s feet came in contact with the opponent. Tackles from behind and from the side (outside of the peripheral vision of the attacker with the ball) increase the likelihood contact will need to be made with the attacker prior to playing the ball.
- **Atmosphere of the game**
Referees must consider the overall temperature of the match and the player in question. Has an aggressive attitude been displayed to that point? Is frustration amongst or between the players evident?

Referees must be able to quickly weigh the SIAPOA criteria and decide whether sufficient criteria are evident rendering the tackle as serious foul play and, thus, a red card.

Video Clip 1: New York at Houston (91:49)

This video clip is an example of a player using excessive force while lunging for the ball in a manner that has endangered the safety of the opponent. The referee is correct in sending the tackler off for serious foul play. Keys to deciphering this challenge are:

- Despite contact with the ball, the tackle is clearly committed using excessive force and, due to its aggressive nature, endangers the safety of the opponent. Look at the speed and uncontrolled nature of the lunge at the opponent.
- Not only are the cleats exposed and contacting the opponent, the fact that the tackler uncontrollably lunges at the opponent, the tackler's entire body goes through him while making contact. The force of the tackle can be seen as the back leg of the tackler even goes through and into the opponent.
- The tackler leaves his feet from a far distance signaling an uncontrollable challenge and increased force/aggressiveness.
- The height of the tackler's foot as well as his body are further signs of the seriousness of the offence.

The referee is well positioned to make the decision and to "feel" the impact of the challenge. The fact that the game is 1:49 into additional time must not factor into the referee's decision as the tackle is 100% misconduct.

Video Clip 2: New York at Houston (75:47)

This clip also involves a lunging tackle that should result in a red card for serious foul play. The lunge for the ball, in this case, is initiated from the side. In addition, the brutal nature of the tackle results in mass confrontation which is handled appropriately by the referee team.

First, review the tackle and apply the SIAPOA criteria. Using the criteria, it is evident that the lunging tackle satisfies the requirements for a red card. Note that the ball is gone as the challenge is initiated. This is an indication that there is no attempt to play the ball. The tackler makes direct contact with the ankle area of the opponent with his exposed cleats. Match officials can ask themselves: "Did the tackler have any opportunity to play the ball?" Clearly, given the distance of the ball at the time of the challenge and the angle of the challenge, the answer is "no."

Second, the handling of the resulting mass confrontation is a good example of teamwork by match officials defusing a potentially volatile situation. Review U.S. Soccer's 2009 Directive on "[Game Disrepute and Mass Confrontation](#)" for more information on the handling of similar situations. The following is a list of factors that make the teamwork effective:

1. Given the closeness of the foul to the assistant referee (AR), the ARs immediate intervention should be applauded. The AR shows no hesitation in providing a positive presence that is effective in preventing escalation.
2. The AR uses his body in a positive, non-confrontational manner to shield/prevent others from participating.
3. The referee's actions are also effective in separating players and then escorting the player to be red carded away into a neutral area.
4. Pursuant to the 2009 directive on "Game Disrepute and Mass Confrontation," the far side AR should come across the field to assist and take notes.

Overall, the immediate and prompt action by the referee and the near side AR defuses and minimizes the need to form the "Triangle of Control." In accordance with the "Game Disrepute and Mass Confrontation" directive, the referee cautions a Houston player (orange jerseys) as the "third man in." In other words, the officials decided that this player's aggressive actions caused the situation to escalate. Hence, this player should be yellow carded for unsporting behavior.

Video Clip 3: Kansas City at Seattle (8:83)

The third clip involving serious foul play also provides a solid example of a tackle that contains all the identified SIAPOA components and, therefore, should result in a red card to the tackler. Given the 100% nature of the red card misconduct, the referee cannot be influenced by the fact that the game is in its early stages (just under nine minutes). The referee is close to play and should be able to make the decision and to "feel" the impact and excessive force of the tackle, consequently, the official has no option but to send the tackler off for serious foul play (note, a more strategic position may be to the inside of play and not so close to the touchline). Referees must quickly apply the SIAPOA criteria and decide that excessive force has been utilized.

The lunging challenge is committed with cleats exposed and up and over the ball. Look at where the contact is made (just below the attacker's knee). Notice the locked knee of the tackler as well as the exposed cleats that fail to make contact with the ball, this indicates the safety of the attacker is clearly jeopardized.

Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity: Law 12

In the week 3's version of the "Week In Review," an example of denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity (DOGSO) was explored and the "4 D Criteria" were listed to assist match officials in making a determination as to whether DOGSO existed and, therefore, a red card mandated. [Click here to review.](#)

The same criteria apply but this time the DOGSO deals with "denying the opposing team a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity by deliberately handling the ball (this does not apply to a goalkeeper within his own penalty area)." In video clip 4 below, the goalkeeper is the last defender and denies the attacker the opportunity to score a goal by handling the ball outside the penalty area. The 2009 Directive "[Handling the Ball](#)" provides criteria for match officials to utilize when judging whether the goalkeeper should be penalized for handling. When viewing the clip, utilize the directive's "making yourself bigger" component in deciding whether a handling offence occurred.

Video Clip 4: Kansas City at Seattle (28:26)

The referee correctly judges that DOGSO by handling has occurred in this clip and, consequently, the goalkeeper must be red carded for "denying the opposing team a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity by deliberately handling the ball" according to the Laws of the Game. The keeper is the last defender and the attacker is heading directly to goal just outside the penalty area. If the goalkeeper does not "make himself bigger," the attacker would have an obvious goal scoring opportunity given the:

- Distance to goal
- Distance to ball

- Defender position/location and number
- Direction to goal

Watch the AR in the bottom of the screen as the clip is played. The AR provides key assistance to the referee by signaling the handling offence as well as providing a silent signal (patting the back pocket) to indicate that the keeper's handling was a red card offence. The ARs signal provides further assurances to the referee that a DOGSO has occurred.

As the clip is viewed, also take note that the ball rebounds directly from the goalkeeper's hands to another attacker who gains possession of the ball in a potentially advantageous position (no one in the goal). Given the time and game situation, the referee may utilize the "wait and see" principle and hold the whistle for a few seconds to see if the attacker is able to take a shot and score a goal from the shot. The application of this skill requires tactical awareness on the part of the referee as well as teamwork on the part of the AR. While using the "wait and see" approach, the referee should not signal advantage unless the advantage materializes (in this case, advantage would only materialize if a goal was scored directly from the shot). By not indicating/signaling advantage in that short period of time, the referee may come back to the original handling offence and send the goalkeeper off for DOGSO.

If a goal were to be scored directly from the shot because the referee has applied the advantage during a DOGSO, despite the handling of the ball or fouling an opponent, the player cannot be sent off but may still be cautioned.

Free Kick Management – Delaying the Restart

The importance of officials having an understanding of the 2009 Referee Program Directives is again illustrated in the referee's correct management of the restart from the free kick awarded. The "Free Kick and Restart Management" directive provides officials, at all levels, guidance in managing free kicks and other restarts. Of particular note is the direction provided match officials relative to delaying the restart of play and failure to respect the required distance – both of which are cautionable offenses.

According to the directive, players must be cautioned for delaying the restart when they deliberately move, lunge or advance directly toward the ball to interfere or prevent a free kick from being executed. In situations where the referee provides a retake of a free kick due to interference by the defender, the directive and the Laws of the Game require that the referee caution the player. It is important, however, that referees take a proactive role in preventing situations that could lead to delaying of the restart and to failure to respect the required distance both of which are cautionable offenses. Quick intervention and presence by the referee can pay dividends in preventing situations from escalating to cautionable infractions.

Video Clip 5: New York at Houston (67:30)

This is a classic case of a defender who deliberately interferes with the taking of a free kick. The defender takes advantage of his closeness to the ball and deliberately advances to the ball to make contact thus preventing the free kick from being taken. It is important to note that the attacker does not play the ball directly into the opponent/defender. The defender takes advantage of his position (nearness to the ball) to prevent the ball from being put into play by moving his foot/leg forward to contact the ball which is a yard or more to his side. As a consequence, the defender must be cautioned for delaying the restart of play.

Looking Forward – Week 5

There have been a high number of cautions and red cards issued for tackles that are committed recklessly or with excessive force. As a result, match officials must maintain heightened awareness for these situations. Use preventative refereeing to modify behavior early in the match. Remember to "influence the future with actions in the present." Do not just referee for the moment, referee for the future. As officials feel the atmosphere of the game increasing in intensity, referees must modify their approach by recognizing the "warning signs" that they must impart greater influence on the game. Remember, flow and risk taking should only be implemented when the game permits.

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