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Referee Programs

2009 Referee Week in Review - Week 6

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 6 – ending April 16, 2009****WEEK 6 OVERVIEW**

A disturbing trend thus far in the season is that we have seen an alarming number of instances where elbows and other forms of contact to the head and facial region have occurred and gone unpunished with several of the instances resulting in injuries. Referee teams (not just referees) need to be more diligent in their identification of situations involving “contact above the shoulder” and in handling out the appropriate form of punishment. This is an athletic and fast game which makes any contact above the shoulder much more dangerous to opponents on the receiving end. For a review, please see the 2009 U.S. Soccer Referee Program Directive on [“Contact Above the Shoulder”](#).

Referees are still exhibiting the ability to provide reasonable flow and rhythm to the game. With nine MLS games played (the most of any weekend thus far), an average of only 20.7 fouls per game were whistled. Referees are working hard to manage the game so the entertainment value is maximized while ensuring the safety of the players is not jeopardized. Referee must, however, not take risks in allowing flow and/or advantage when the safety of the player is in question. Referees must focus on the 100% misconduct situations like “contact above the shoulder” and ensure players are dealt with according to the Laws of the Game and U.S. Soccer Referee Program Directives.

WEEK 6 COMMENTARY**Contact Above the Shoulders: Law 12**

Tool or weapon? As you watch the clips that follow, think severity, force and result and how each of these factors determine whether the arm/forearm is being used as a tool or weapon by the player. [“Week In Review 3”](#) outlined criteria to be used by match officials in evaluating whether the arm was utilized as a “tool” or “weapon.”

When potential incidents of contact above the shoulder arise, referees must work hard to strategically position themselves so that they have the maximum angle of vision for all aerial challenges. Officials must not relax in situations that seem harmless. Officials cannot afford to be flat footed and must anticipate long balls as this will assist with the correct identification of “contact above the shoulders.”

Additionally, pregame discussions amongst the match officials can help ready the mind’s eye for such situations and help each official better define the actions that make the use of the arm/hand more of a “weapon” than a “tool.”

Video Clip 1: [New York at Kansas City \(58:21\)](#)

The challenge by the attacker (white jersey) is one whereby the player leads with the forearm to protect the space for him to play the ball (using it as a tool). The forward motion takes him into the defender (blue shirt) and there is contact. This is a reckless challenge and should be recognized as such as the contact is not severe or excessive. Also, consider that the attacker does not swing his arm back into the opponent (this would increase the severity and the force). The inaction of the referee in this clip results in visual dissent from the Kansas player.

Referees, in circumstances such as these, must take appropriate action. Doing nothing or a simple foul call in these circumstances are not options. A yellow card for unsporting behavior is appropriate for this foul.

Video Clip 2: [Kansas City at Toronto \(36:04\)](#)

Here it is clear that both players use their arms as a tool to leverage space. The player in the red jersey jumps higher, leads with his forearm and makes contact with the side of the opponent’s head. Play was allowed to continue with no recognition of the action. Pursuant to the directive on [“Injury Management”](#), the referee needs to stop play immediately as one player has sustained a serious injury (contact to the head/face area). Additionally, the red jersey player is deserving of a yellow card for the reckless manner in which the challenge was executed.

Look at where this aerial challenge takes place. The fourth official and AR1 both have a part to play in this situation to ensure that the referee is apprised of the actions specifically since he has misread the severity of the contact. At the professional level, where the referee team has access to a communication system, the fourth official and/or AR1 should immediately inform the referee to stop play as a serious head injury has occurred. When play has been stopped, further communication should occur to review the challenge and associated contact thereby ensuring the player on the red team is cautioned for unsporting behavior.

For those officials without communication devices, AR1 should raise his flag to get the referee’s attention to stop play. Once play has been

stopped, AR1 and/or the fourth official can call the referee over to discuss the severity of the aerial challenge so that the correct official action (caution) can be administered. Match officials need to maximize teamwork in these type of situations and do it in an expedited manner whereby the correct decision is made with as little down time as possible.

Video Clip 3: [Chivas USA at Toronto \(79:00\)](#)

While the prior two clips involved contact above the shoulder involving an aerial challenge, this situation takes place while a defender is challenging an attacker from behind. The well positioned referee makes a decision that the defender fouls the attacker by shoving him in the upper back with his forearm. This foul was reckless in nature and the player should be cautioned for unsporting behavior. The referee does a good job sending a strong message to the player. The use of personality to send a message in fouls like this is important as there is a fine line between the foul being reckless (a caution) or excessive force (a red card). Remember, according to the Laws of the Game, "reckless" means:

"The player has acted with complete disregard to the danger to, or consequences for, his opponent."

In cases similar to this clip (challenge from behind), however, when the forearm contact occurs above the shoulders and excessive force is used, the referee must red card the player for violent conduct (as there would be no challenge for the ball and the ball not within playing distance).

Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO): Law 12

Two prior "Week in Review" summaries (weeks 3 and 4) included examples of denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity (DOGSO). Another illustration of excellent identification, by the referee, of a defender who has denied an attacker the opportunity to score a goal occurred this past weekend. U.S. Soccer has established a set of criteria to be used by match officials in order to correctly identify situations where a red card is mandated for DOGSO. This key to correct identification is the "4 D Criteria." Prior to watching the clip that follows, review the "4 D Criteria" as described in "[Week In Review 3](#)".

Video Clip 4: [New York at Kansas City \(1:34\)](#)

With only 1:34 into the game, it is easy for match officials to be relaxed (both mentally and physically) and unprepared to make difficult decisions. This situation highlights the need for all officials to be prepared mentally and physically from the opening whistle. A mindset to "expect the unexpected" will be a significant aid in ensuring the referee team gets early decisions correct.

In this video clip, the referee team has the appropriate mindset and is ready to make a tough decision that could potentially influence the outcome of the game. The "potentially influence the outcome of the game" factor must not be a negative consideration in this case as the foul is 100% misconduct in the form of DOGSO. As a result, the defender must be red carded, as he is, for "denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity" and a penalty kick must be awarded as the foul occurred in the penalty area. This clip provides an excellent example of awareness and alertness on the part of the referee.

Key considerations for the referee in deciphering the call are:

- If the attacker was not fouled, he would have gained possession of the ball and would have had an obvious opportunity to score.
- Although there is a defender parallel to the fouled attacker, this defender would not have been able to close down on the attacker and prevent the attacker's opportunity to score. In other words, the defender's position would not have prevented the opportunity to have an opportunity to score a goal.
- The referee must understand "why the defender committed the foul." The defender miss touches the ball and must foul the attacker because he knows the attacker will have the opportunity to score a goal if he is not taken down. It is not a hard foul but a foul nevertheless.

If the assistant referee (AR) has a clear view of the challenge, he should be prepared to provide information to the referee regarding whether DOGSO occurred or not. Given this is a game critical decision that the referee team must get correct, should the referee have any question as to whether the foul met the DOGSO criteria, the referee should make eye contact with the nearside AR and the AR should feel compelled to provide a silent signal (patting his back pocket) to indicate the foul requires a red card for DOGSO. Because of the critical nature of the situation, the game and the referee require AR participation in getting the decision correct.

Video Clip 5: [Los Angeles at Colorado \(73:16\)](#)

This clip begins as a case of mistaken identity but concludes with the correct decision by the referee team. The referee originally decided that a foul existed on the tackle and, therefore, issued a red card for denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity. As the play develops, it can be seen that the ball is played cleanly and the attacker then goes over the tackler's leg. Hence, there is no foul and DOGSO cannot exist.

Since this is a game critical decision, the referee team must make the correct call. The AR, who has a clear and unobstructed view of the situation, sees the referee issuing a red card and immediately concludes that the card is being issued for DOGSO. Given the fact he was 100% certain there was no foul, the AR then makes contact with the referee to inform him that he had observed the defender making contact with the ball and not the opponent. Based upon this information and his "feel" for the situation, the referee rescinds the red card by notifying the team captains. The game is correctly restarted by dropping the ball because the referee's whistle was inadvertent (no foul had occurred). Note: If the referee had restarted the game, then he may not change/reverse his decision. This is covered in Law 5 – The Referee:

"The referee may only change a decision on realizing that it is incorrect or, at his discretion, on the advise of an assistant referee or the fourth official, provided that he has not restarted play or terminated the match."

Also, it is important to realize that a "pass back" situation does not exist because the referee has judged that the tackler did not "deliberately" kick the ball to the goalkeeper who then touches the ball with his hands. This was a fair sliding tackle that made contact with the ball and was not intended to play the ball back to the goalkeeper.

Finally, it is important to note that game critical decisions (like the one in this clip) must be included as part of the referee team's pregame briefing. Referees must establish an environment for the ARs and fourth official to feel comfortable participating in game critical situations. A "get it right" attitude must prevail. Referees and ARs must not rely on technology to get the job done as technology often fails. In this case, the AR can ask himself the following questions to decide whether to participate or not:

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

As these questions relate to this clip, the associated answers require the AR to provide information to the referee. ARs, like the one in this clip, who provide positive information to the referee based upon their answers to the two questions above, should be applauded for ensuring the "good of the game" is serviced.

Communication Devices

At the professional level, the use of communication devices is a regular part of the game. Use of such devices that enable real-time communication between the members of the referee team can be a positive factor in managing the game and getting more decisions correct. At the same time, though, they should not replace standard means of communication and the normal visual contact that should occur amongst the referee team. In other words, they should be a supplement to standard modes of communication and not a replacement.

Use of communication devices takes practice and preparation. Pregame discussions should include a review of the use of the devices. As a supplement, in general terms, the devices should be used to:

- Support the flag signal when it is not seen or when further information is needed to enhance the signal.
- Exchange or give game critical information that requires immediate action.
- Get a member of the referee team's immediate attention.

Acceptance of Gratitude by Officials

Match officials may not ask for or accept any forms of "appreciation" from teams and/or players competing in a formal competition (for example, leagues or an official tournament). Forms of "appreciation" include, but are not limited to, items such as player jerseys, signatures, or other memorabilia. Officials must always be cognizant of the message being sent and the perception being created when they accept any item from teams and/or players. This includes situations in which you are not working the game in an official capacity but are an official in the formal competition.

Shortly, U.S. Soccer will release a policy paper on the acceptance forms of "appreciation" by match officials. This will be made available for all match officials.

Looking Forward – Week 7

Tool versus weapon. Extra time should be spent reviewing the criteria involved in deciding whether the arm/hand/elbow was utilized as a tool or a weapon. Look for positive ways to slow the game down in these situations with the ultimate objective of being able to take appropriate action. Until such time as the criteria are second nature, referee teams will need to review and re-review to reinforce the importance of getting decisions involving "contact above the shoulder" correct.

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Top

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