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Referee Programs

2009 Referee Week in Review - Week 7



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 7 – ending May 3, 2009

WEEK 7 OVERVIEW

Last week, the focus and emphasis was on “contact above the shoulder” – the use of the elbow, arm or hand (hard surfaces) as a “weapon” against an opponent’s face (soft surface) when making aerial challenges or when challenging for or shielding the ball. This week, once again there were instances of using the elbow in a manner that meets the criteria for a red card. As we will see in the commentary below, the first red card for this type of “excessive force” challenge was issued this week in MLS. This correct decision was made by a referee who was running his first game of the season and he should be applauded for understanding the criteria and applying it to a game situation.

Despite getting this “contact above the shoulder” decision correct, another clear elbow that should have resulted in a player being sent off was missed by the officiating team. The decision making criteria has been explained, reiterated and illustrated multiple times yet the overall “batting average” for getting such calls correct is poor.

This week was also highlighted by two exceptional penalty kick decisions which will be discussed in detail.

WEEK 7 COMMENTARY

Contact Above the Shoulders: Law 12

The warning signs are there. The referee is positioned correctly. The criteria are applied. Now, can the referee “connect the dots?” Can the referee connect the warning signs and actions to the criteria? Is the referee’s databank of information able to process what his eyes have seen? And, do it in a split second?

The ability to “connect the dots” or translate visual signs into mental decisions is the challenge facing match officials (not just the referee) relative to making appropriate misconduct decisions when player actions should be clearly differentiated between “tools” and “weapons.”

In the “contact above the shoulder” examples provided below, the decisions are seemingly obvious and evident. So, what is preventing match officials from executing correctly? For each official, this may be different. However, each official must have the courage to make the difficult decision regardless of the score, the players involved, the time of the match or other factors involving the “big picture” or atmosphere of the game. When a “hard surface” (elbow, forearm, hand) connects with a “soft surface” (face, neck), serious damage or injury can result. This is why match officials must treat this form of violent conduct or serious foul play seriously.

A thorough and current understanding of the criteria officials should use to make correct “contact above the shoulder” decisions can be found as part of U.S. Soccer’s [2009 Referee Program Directives](#). In addition, match officials can constantly retrain their mind’s eye by regularly rereading prior “Week In Review” publications as we have continually reinforced the criteria and provided examples of real game situations.

Video Clip 1: [Real Salt Lake at Colorado \(79:25\)](#)

This first clip illustrates “contact above the shoulder” that is clearly a red card for serious foul play (the ball was being challenged). Unfortunately, the referee fails to recognize the actions and “connect the dots.” Let’s examine the play and provide a basis for match officials to get this decision correct:

1. Warning signs

- The defender (white jersey) steps in front of the attacker running into space because he is beat and wants to prevent the attacker from gaining possession of the ball in an advantageous position.
- The referee must work to focus not only on the legs of the players but also the upper bodies.
- Notice the upper body action of the defender. He is reaching in front with his forearm and leading with his elbow.
- The referee must ask: “How did the attacker stop so suddenly when there is no foot contact?”

- The height of the defender's arm and elbow. Why are they so high? To stop the attacker, the defender could make contact with the midsection of the attacker but **to stop the attacker in the midsection is much harder than a blow to the head.** The defender is attempting to disguise his actions.
 - Reaction of the attacker: His body goes up in the air not straight back or to the ground. This shows the defender has used the "up and in" weapon criteria forcing the opponent into the air.
 - The attacker immediately grabs his face and his head snaps back. His midsection or body does not stop or snap, it is the head.
 - **The result:** The attacking player is clearly injured. His immediate reaction must send a message to the referee that the contact was outside of the norm.
2. Referee position
- Given the speed of the play and the proximity to goal, the referee needs to be closer to the action. A quick burst of speed once the referee observes there is an attacking advantage would put him several yards further into the penalty area and allow him to "feel" any potential illegal use of the arm/elbow.
 - Closer position will place the referee in a location to sell a potential penalty kick decision as the defender is beat and the play is approximately eight yards from the near post.

Video Clip 2: Seattle at Chicago (47:37)

This video clip shows an aerial challenge in which the player's elbow (hard surface) is used to make unnecessary contact above the shoulder into the opponent's face (soft surface). In this case, the referee correctly "connects the dots" and is able to use his databank of criteria to make a decision to send the player off for serious foul play.

The referee can make this decision with confidence because he is properly positioned and sufficiently close to play so that he can "feel" the action and observe the contact. The assistant referee (AR) should also provide confirmation of the referee's decision or, in the event the referee has not identified the contact as a red card offense, the AR must provide this information if his databank recognizes the actions as excessive force.

The following weapon criteria, as outlined in the "Contact Above the Shoulder" Directive, are evident in this aerial challenge:

- Safety of the player is endangered
- Hard surface (elbow) contacting a soft surface (face)
- The arm/elbow is up and in to the opponent. The player leads with the elbow.
- The arm/elbow is above the jumper's own shoulder – not a natural position.
- Injury results.

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

Denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity (DOGSO) has been a popular topic in three "Week in Review" summaries (week 3, 4 and 6). The speed of the game, counter-attack play and the advent of flat back four defenses has, in part, led to more DOGSO challenges for referees.

In the past, the focus has been on situations in which a player must be sent off for DOGSO. One of the keys to correct application of DOGSO is the term "obvious." The referee must determine, using the "4 D Criteria" described in "Week In Review 3", whether the attacker would have had an "obvious" opportunity to score a goal or get a shot off on goal.

Video Clip 3: Bermuda at Real Maryland (83:00) – USL2

In this USL2 match, the referee judges that a DOGSO has occurred. However, under closer review, an "obvious" opportunity to score does NOT exist. Consequently, a red card should not have been issued. Why? Because three of the "4 D's" have not been met.

1. **Distance to goal**
The foul occurs approximately 36 yards out from the goal. Given this distance, the inside defender may have had the opportunity to contain the attacker and prevent an "obvious" opportunity to score. In addition, the wide defender would have had the chance to catch up to the attacker given his distance to goal. Remember, distance means time and time means a defender may be able to regain an advantageous position.
2. **Direction to goal**
The attacker's direction to goal does not provide him with an "obvious" opportunity to shoot or score. There are two factors to consider here: (a) The play is wide on the field which provides a poor angle for the attacker going to goal and an opportunity for other defenders to track him down and prevent a shot; and (b) The attacker's touch on the ball is away from the goal to an even wider position.
3. **Defender position/location**
The fact that one defender is running directly alongside the attacker must be taken into consideration. The second defender, to the inside of the attacker and the ball, may also have a chance for the ball or to close down the attacker given the attacker's touch on the ball (away from the goal) and the distance to goal.

Two other items need to be reviewed in this clip. First, the goalkeeper definitely commits a foul. The foul is worthy of a yellow card for unsporting behavior because it is not only reckless but it is also tactical. The challenge lacks the intensity/severity to make it excessive force.

Second, watch the referee instead of the ball as the long pass is made. The referee does not anticipate the need to move rapidly up field. Notice how the referee is walking (lacks energy) and does not begin advancing forward until the counter-attack pass has traveled approximately 20 yards in the air. The referee's lack of urgency in movement causes him to be too far behind play and in a recovery position. When the ball is first passed back by the yellow team, the referee must not be flat footed and must quickly begin his movement up field. Move with the anticipation of the play. Do not wait to react. Attempt to move before the ball is played forward.

Handling the Ball by "Making Yourself Bigger:" Law 12

This scenario is as much about teamwork as it is about a correct handling the ball decision. Excellent vision and courage by the AR leads to

the game-deciding penalty kick. A key factor in evaluating handling offenses, as outlined in U.S. Soccer's 2009 Referee Program Directive "Handling the Ball," is: "Making Yourself Bigger". In other words, does a player:

- Take away space and passing lanes with his arm/hand?
- Use the arm/hand as a barrier?
- Use the arm/hand to occupy more space by extending his reach?

Think: Does the player make the body bigger with his arm/hand? And, does the player benefit from the extension of the arm/hand?

Video Clip 4: New York at Los Angeles Galaxy (37:30)

In this clip, the AR makes the handling decision which results in the only goal of the game from the ensuing penalty kick. The AR should be applauded for having the courage to make a game critical decision and makes the decision based upon the "making yourself bigger" criteria. First, we will examine the decision itself and then we will examine the mechanics behind the decision.

The Decision

Because the defender's arms are extended from his body, he has taken away space from the attacker. The defender's arms are used as a barrier to prevent the service of the ball. The defender is using his arms to make himself bigger and, consequently, he has benefited from the result of his arms occupying space beyond the normal reach of a player. Note that the arms are not near the defender's body and not at the defender's side – normal positions for a defender trying to contain an attacker.

The Mechanics

The AR is empowered to make the handling decision as he has a clear view of the incident (the defender's body and arms are directly facing him). The referee's distance from the play has also been considered by the AR prior to raising the flag. An AR who is 100 percent certain of his decision and is certain that the "making yourself bigger" criteria has been met is compelled by the needs of the game to be involved.

Once the AR has made the determination that the criteria exists for handling, he should make eye contact with the referee. The eye contact should be followed by the AR raising and giving a slight wave of the flag to indicate a foul. The next step is for the AR to indicate to the referee that the foul should result in a penalty kick:

"If the referee stops the game, the assistant referee first indicates penalty kick by **holding the flag across the lower body** and then begins walking toward the corner flag."

You can see this mechanic in action by focusing on the work of the AR in the clip. The AR correctly utilizes the mechanic (holds the flag across his waist after the slight wave and the whistle) to indicate that the foul should result in a penalty kick. This revised signal will be included in the next edition of U.S. Soccer's publication entitled, "Guide to Procedures for Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials."

On another note, the referee needs to show more energy and must increase his body language to implement and sell the decision. The casual approach by the referee does not exude confidence in the decision. In other situations, players may come at the referee to protest and the referee must show positive authority in his decision making process.

Correct Decision Leading to a Penalty Kick: Law 12 and Law 14

The modern game is ripe with jostling, holding and pushing during services (frequently aerial services) into the penalty area. Most often, players use these tactics to slow the opponent or to gain a positional advantage. Corner kicks and free kicks are most often the culprits. Referees must be aware of these tactics and must take preventative action by stopping play at the first occurrence and then warning players. Additionally, referees must position themselves at the restart so that they can see all players who will be in the "drop zone" or who could potentially move into the "drop zone." Once the ball is serviced, the referee should move his position to ensure he maintains the maximum angle of vision for any action that may occur.

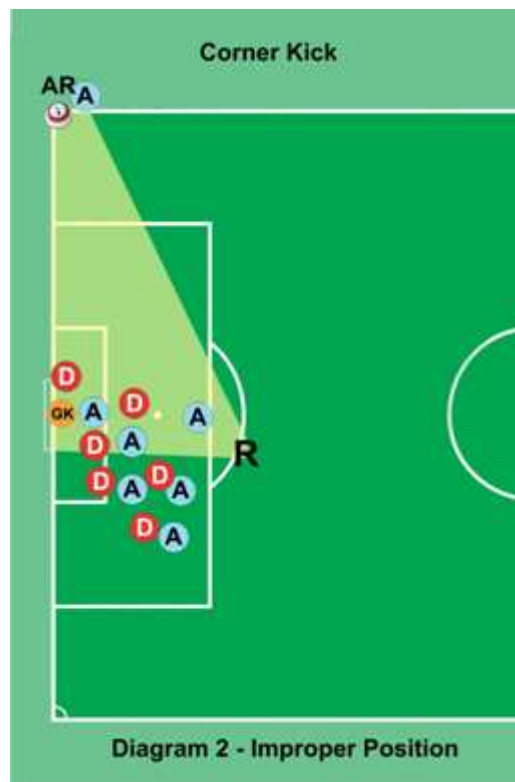
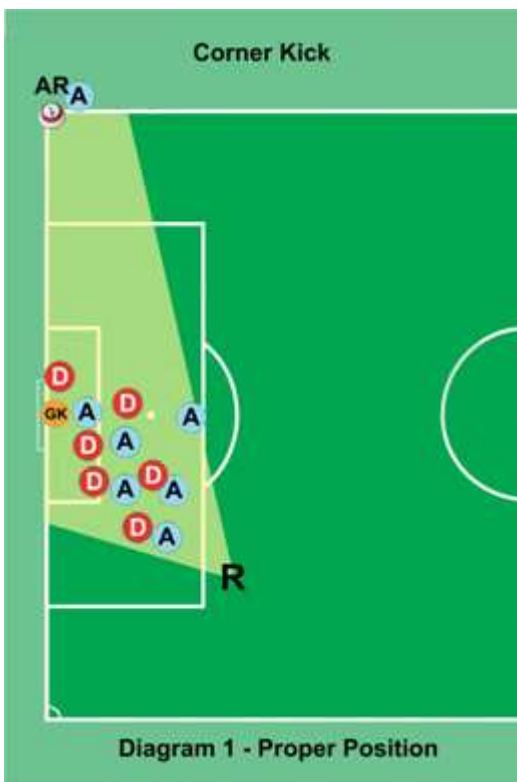


Diagram 1 shows the proper position for a referee on a corner kick. All players are in his vision. As the ball is serviced, the referee should monitor his position and move to a location that gives him the best view of the "next phase of play." For example, as the wide players move to a short service, the referee should move concurrently while ensuring all players are within his view.

Improper position is illustrated in Diagram 2 above. The referee starts from a position that puts him at a disadvantage. Players are behind him and, as a result, the referee would not be able to see any jostling or contact outside of his angle of vision.

U.S. Soccer's "Guide to Procedures for Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials" reinforces the proper positioning mechanic by providing flexibility in positioning "if needed to focus on potential conflicts among players, to control interference with the goalkeeper, or to prepare for an unusual team tactic on the restart (e.g., "short" corner)."

Prevention and positioning are keys to successfully dealing with restarts. Establish a presence by sending an "early message" and by "setting up the next call" through your actions early in the game.

Video Clip 5: Rochester at Cleveland (47:24) – USL1

Earlier in the game, the referee "sets up" this penalty kick decision by managing the shoving taking place on a corner kick. Hence, the referee has used preventative officiating to send an appropriate message.

The referee is well positioned to monitor any challenges in the "drop zone." There are no players behind him and he has a clear line of vision to the action.

As the corner kick approaches its target, a defender undercuts the attacker by throwing his body into the opponent who has jumped to head the ball. This action prevents the attacker from being on the receiving end of the service. The referee is correct in deciding a foul has been committed by the defender and awarding a penalty kick (the ball was in play and it occurred in the penalty area).

A yellow card for the offence is not necessary as the severity of the offence does not warrant it. This is a careless foul and not reckless (which requires a caution).

Looking Forward – Week 8

For assistant referees (ARs), focus should be on lateral movement and sidestepping. The ability to keep shoulders square to the field not only widens peripheral vision but it places assistant referees in a position to make sharper offside decisions. ARs need to practice sidestepping and become very proficient in its application especially when the ball is moving at slower speeds and/or the defense is shifting position in five or so yard increments. Strong lateral movement must be supplemented by the ability to transition from sidestepping to sprinting or from sprinting to sidestepping. Hustle and movement are mechanisms for ARs to keep their minds focused and in the game as they often face periods of non-involvement where the mind could rest and the body get lazy. Assistant referees are a vital part of the game's success as evidenced by the work of the AR in clip 4 – the handling decision leading to a penalty kick. Overall, ARs are making positive contributions especially with solid offside decisions.

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