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## Referee Programs

**2009 Referee Week in Review - Week 9**

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 9 – ending May 17, 2009****WEEK OVERVIEW**

This week features many different topics. Three of the video clips will involve items that have yet to be discussed this season: positioning by the referee, dissent and a missed offside decision that leads to a goal. However, one clip involves a weekly occurrence that officials have yet to master: “contact above the shoulder.”

Discussions around items like positioning and dissent provide reference points for future actions on the part of match officials. These may seem minor compared to other areas that have been addressed in the first nine weeks but failure to review them may lead to complacency and/or future poor decisions.

Overall this season, there have been a low number of missed offside decisions, which is indicative of the focus and concentration by assistant referees (ARs). However, this week a missed offside decision led to a goal and ultimately impacted the outcome of the game.

This weekend, U.S. Soccer’s Development Academy Spring Showcase will take place with 150 teams and over 110 referees from over 10 states arrive in Sarasota, Florida beginning Friday, May 22. In conjunction with the Showcase, U.S. Soccer is holding a National Assessor Training Event in which 16 National Assessors will be attending for training and will be assessing match officials during the five days of competition.

The Showcase provides referees with an outstanding training opportunity as well as the chance to interact and learn from other referees, top level assessors, players and coaches.

**WEEK 9 COMMENTARY****Contact Above the Shoulder: Law 12**

We have stressed this topic since the beginning of the year and this week we had several occurrences of the arm/elbow being used as a “weapon” in MLS and WPS matches. Match officials must be able to anticipate or “smell” the potential for “contact above the shoulder.” Review U.S. Soccer’s 2009 Directive on “Contact Above the Shoulder” for further explanation regarding the use of the arm/elbow/hand as a “weapon” versus a “tool.”

Officials must be able to visual the actions that make the use of the arm/elbow/hand a “weapon” and be able to grasp the criteria. Key to identification, aside from the definition of “weapon” are the following terms:

- **Force**  
The force of the action must be considered. However, when a hard surface is contacting a soft surface, much less force is required to increase the severity of the contact thus making it excessive.
- **Excessive**  
Is the arm/elbow/hand used in a manner that involves excessive force? In other words, more force than necessary to complete the task at hand. Also think brutality. The Laws of the Game use the term “brutality” to assist in the identification of actions that involve serious foul play and violent conduct.
- **Severity**  
The extent of the contact and force. The harshness, cruelty and ruthlessness of the act. When a hard surface (arm/elbow/hand) is contacting a soft surface (face/neck) the severity of the contact is magnified. When a player cocks their arm and makes a fist and then delivers the blow up and in toward the opponent’s face, this is severe.

**Video Clip 1: Washington at Boston (50:56) – WPS**

This is an example of “contact above the shoulder” that must be sanctioned with a red card (serious foul play) as the arm/elbow is being used as a weapon. The force and severity are not only evident but the excessive nature of the action should resonate with the referee, assistant referee and the fourth official. The player is “establishing territory” by using her elbow in an aggressive manner. This player could have merely held off the opponent by restraining her with her arm/hand in the chest area but, instead, chose to use excessive force by going up and in to

the opponent's facial/neck area.

When officials see that an attacker is shielding the ball with a defender marking tightly from behind and there is body contact involved, the officials should recognize this as a warning sign of a potential situation involving "contact above the shoulder" as attacking players may feel compelled to create space between themselves and the opponent ("establish territory"). A quick whistle may be considered by the referee to penalize the defender for holding the opponent if the referee feels that such holding is outside the normal flow of play and expected contact for the level of the game/players.

In this clip, the referee needs to position herself better by moving to a more strategic location so that she has a clear line of vision to the players. This is possible considering the attacker is shielding the ball and the players are stationary. If a referee recognizes and anticipates the "establishing territory" warning signs, then urgency can be used to maximize positioning to see the actions by both players.

The AR should also be involved. The AR should have a good deal of her focus on the two players as the play is near her, the ball is not moving, and the players are playing with their backs to goal so a quick pass forward is not likely. Hence, the offside line is less critical given these factors. Additionally, similar to the referee, the AR must also recognize the "establishing territory" warning signs.

Finally, a third set of eyes (the fourth official) may be able to provide valuable information to the referee in this "game critical situation." Although the foul is a good distance away, if the fourth official observes the violent nature of the contact, then he should feel compelled to bring it to the referee's attention by moving quickly down the touchline to make contact (verbally or visually).

In this clip, it is a clear red card due to the excessive force used.

### **Missed Offside Leading to a Goal: Law 11**

Concentration and focus. Two critical components for success as an AR. The ability to block out prior decisions, the crowd and other aspects of the atmosphere surrounding the game is vital for ARs as they must make precise decisions in a split second. Often, these decisions come after extended periods of non-involvement on the part of the AR.

Proper positioning and body mechanics are also key components to effect work and decisions by ARs. As much as possible, ARs should work to keep their shoulders and body square to the field while maintaining the offside position. This requires ARs to excel at sidestepping and lateral movement. By being square to the field, ARs have the best view of the second-to-last defender (the offside line) and the ball. In the majority of situations, peripheral vision can be used to maintain contact with the ball while the main focus can be on the offside line. Sidestepping also gives ARs the opportunity, over short distances, to adjust to the movement of the second-to-last defender.

In summary, to make an optimum offside decision, the AR must:

1. Know the latest interpretation and application methods.
2. Always be in proper position.
3. Be fully concentrated and focused even during down time.
4. Be aware of the human "eye factor." If in doubt, the flag stays down. Use the "wait and see" principle to assist in decision making which will aid in clearly seeing ball trajectory. Remember, better a late flag and be correct than an early flag and be wrong.

### **Video Clip 2: D.C. United at Chivas USA (24:30)**

Prior to the decision shown in this clip, the AR has been required to make two other close offside decisions that were questioned. As a consequence, the AR may still be questioning himself and thus may have lost focus and concentration.

At the moment the ball is passed by his teammate, virtually the entire body of the attacker is in front of the second-to-last defender. Hence, there is no benefit of doubt to the attack in this situation. The attacker should be declared offside once the AR has determined that he is "interfering with play." According to the Laws of the Game, the player should be declared offside because, at the time the ball is passed by his teammate, he has "interfered with play" while being "nearer to his opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second last opponent."

Notice how the AR is running forward when the offside pass is made. While the AR is running forward, the defender is moving in the opposite direction. The AR has not given himself the best opportunity to get this decision correct because he is running forward and not sidestepping. Sidestepping would enable him to move with more precision and match the precise movements of the defender and, therefore, be more accurately positioned to make a split second decision.

### **Dissent by Word or Action a Cautionable Offense: Law 12**

Law 12, Fouls and Misconduct requires referees to caution players who dispute or dissent (argue) a referee's decision either verbally and/or by action (non-verbal). U.S. Soccer has asked officials to take a firm stance against dissent because it:

- Erodes the authority of the referee;
- Reduces the enjoyment of other participants and spectators; and
- Can spread if left unchecked.

The 2009 Directive entitled "Dissent" provides officials with multiple examples of various forms of dissent.

Referees have been asked to take a "common sense" approach to dealing with dissent and consider the manner in which the dissent is delivered. Often times, it is the manner in which dissent is displayed that determines whether a yellow card is warranted or whether another method (like a severe verbal reprimand) of managing the situation will deliver positive results. Remember, the referee's response to dissent

must be consistent with the potential impact of the dissent.

**Video Clip 3: Kansas City at Real Salt Lake (29:38)**

Despite the game being less than 30 minutes old, the referee must take a firm position against dissent that is delivered in a negative and persistent manner. In this example, the combination of the player's verbal and visual actions require the referee to caution him for dissent. Key in interpreting the action is the persistent and exaggerated nature of the player's actions. Because of the potential impact resulting from the manner in which the dissent is delivered, the referee is required to caution the player for dissent. This is not a candidate for referees to manage with merely a verbal admonition. The player's non-verbal actions are too significant of a challenge to the referee's authority. This is **not** a momentary "emotional outburst." It is extended and overly public.

Referees are being asked to take early action against players who exhibit dissent-like conduct thereby preventing the deterioration of player behavior. As stated in the "Dissent" directive, early recognition and early attempts to address protesting players will send a message that will hopefully resonate throughout the remainder of the game. Personality and presence must be at the forefront of a common sense approach. Referees who impart their personality early and often are less likely to have to issue yellow cards for dissent later in the game.

**Positioning of the Referee – Throw-In: Law 5**

U.S. Soccer's publication entitled, "Guide to Procedures for Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials" provides general guidance to officials relative to positioning during dynamic and static play. In general, referee positioning must be "flexible and intelligent." It must be flexible enough to observe active play yet intelligent enough to position the referee for cover potential "next phases of play." Often times, the referee must position themselves so that they can cover the greatest number of future areas of action. Extreme positions can leave some potential "next phases" of play uncovered which can lead to incorrect or missed decisions due to poor positioning (poor angles of vision, too far from play, etc.).

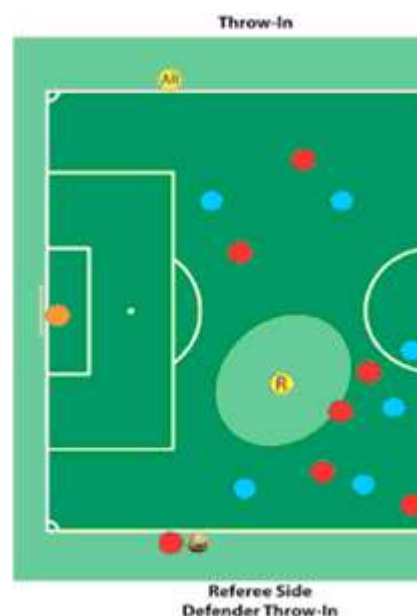
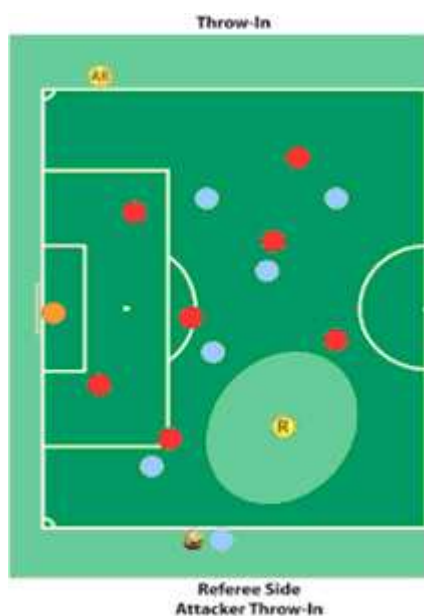
**Video Clip 4: Chicago at Toronto (56:54)**

The referee in this clip steps off the field of play some 10 yards in advance of a throw-in. Once the throw-in is taken, the referee runs along the touchline a yard or so off the field. Taking a position like the one utilized by the referee limits options when consideration is given to potential "next phases of play."

In the "Guide to Procedures for Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials," referees are encouraged to remain on the field to the inside of the thrower. A diagram of the correct position is included in the "Guide" for your reference. From this position, the referee can cover multiple potential "next phases of play:"

- **Balls thrown to the corner flag**  
The referee can trail play into the corner.
- **Balls thrown in and then immediately sent/crossed over to the other side of the field**  
The inside position allows the referee to gain 10 or more yards as the ball is switched to the other side of the field and will give him a better angle of vision. If the referee were off the field of play, he would have to work hard to recover the distance lost as the ball is switched across the field.
- **Long throw-ins into the penalty area**  
A central position allows the referee to be closer to the landing zone or target zone in the penalty area if that is the intended objective of a long throw-in.
- **Counter-attack after lost ball by the attack**  
An off field position puts the referee in a poor position to respond to a throw-in that is won by the defense and quickly played up field to initiate a counter attack.

Below are the positions recommended in the "Guide to Procedures for Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials" as they relate to throw-ins taken from the referee's end of the touch line.



**Looking Forward – Week 10**

Continuous focus on teamwork to ensure the referee team makes the correct decision. This includes officials taking the time to confer as a group or by using the communication devices. When injuries are present, the referee team has sufficient time to get the call correct. If injuries are not present and a match official has a “gut feel” or senses they may have missed something or may have seen something that requires action, then this official should find an avenue to connect with the other members of the officiating crew who may be better equipped to provide information or connect to provide valuable information.

Additionally, as part of their “tool box” of information, match officials must be cognizant of warning signs like the one associated with clip 1 (click to review [Video Clip 1: Washington at Boston \(50:56\) – WPS](#)). As these warning signs appear, officials need to act to prevent through anticipation. This may mean use of personality/presence, modifying a position or imparting more control over the match. In any case, preventative refereeing versus curative refereeing must take precedence.

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