

Ten Important Items Referees Should Know

As referees begin to upgrade and seek higher classifications and referee grade, the assessor begins to look more intently at their performance. The following are a compilation of comments obtained from a number of years of assessing and were all at one time or another the reason for low grades on an assessment.

1. The diagonal was not deep enough or broad enough. The dynamic positioning was not that of looking forward, across the ball, at the lead assistant referee.
2. Positioning on static plays (re-starts) was predictable and unchanging. Too often it did not give a good perspective of the action in the goal area (such as on a corner kick).
3. The referee, or assistant referee, was left behind on breakaways. Referees frequently compound this by persisting in the exact diagonal instead of racing to where active play is.
4. Not recognizing serious foul play and then not having the courage to address it and correct it.
5. Allowing encroachment by a defender on a re-start, and not establishing a defensive wall position (recent changes (2004) in interpretation of the Laws by USSF has caused a modification to the referee's actions in this situation (see below) – *ed.*)
6. Missing the off the ball fouls and challenges, or where the assistant referee either misses these acts or fails to inform the referee of them.
7. Reluctance to issue a second caution to a player who persists in further cautionable conduct.
8. Assistant referees do not concentrate on the match; they become distracted because of inactivity, or sideline incidents. They do not follow the ball all the way to the Goal line.
9. Referees and assistant referees do not function as a cohesive, single unit. Many signals tend to be sloppy or, more often, casual. The function of the team should be effective before, during and after the match.
10. Sideline control, bench control and the handling of substitutions are frequently casual or ignored. Also the referee too often assumes this task and not the assistant referee.

Certainly there are many more actions and non-actions that can have an impact on an assessment. These ten however seem to be among the more common and also the more correctable. Officials who work on these points will usually come out of a contest with more than satisfying assessment scores.

Additional information concerning point 5 above:

From the Ask a Referee site (<http://www.drix.net/jim/past043.html>)

GETTING THE REQUIRED DISTANCE [LAW 13]

Your question:

I coach a U18 girls team. At our last game our team was awarded a free kick just outside our 18 yard box. As our player approached the ball to take the kick, an opponent standing to her right (within 10 yards) moved in front of her and when she kicked the ball it struck the opponent and rebounded to the opponent's teammate - a shot was taken but narrowly missed. There was no call. I don't like to say things to the refs from the sideline, but I did say, "what about 10 yards"? The assistant referee said, "have your players ask for 10 yards if they want it". Later my players told me the ref told them, "you have to ask for ten yards." This seems to be a trend in our area - to require the team with the kick to ASK FOR 10. This in my opinion is a direct violation of Law

13, interrupts the flow of the game and gives the opponent an advantage not in the spirit of the game. From Law 13, "If when a free kick is taken, an opponent is closer to the ball than the required distance: the kick is retaken." Also, to fail to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a free kick is a cautionable offence and the offender is shown the yellow card.

I am also a referee and I am increasingly dismayed at players encroaching on 10 yards and being very surprised when I give them a yellow card for not moving the required distance from the ball. Am I missing something? What say you?

USSF answer (July 15, 2004):

The referee is under no obligation to stop the kicker from kicking the ball at a free kick, no matter where the opposing players are positioned, particularly if the kicking player has seen that the opponent is encroaching. Both teams are expected to abide by the requirement to get the ball back in play. All referees should encourage and allow quick free kicks, particularly if that is what the kicking team wants to do. At all free kicks the referee should back away, watch what happens, and intervene in quick free kick situations where an opponent closer than the minimum required distance actively makes a play for the ball (as opposed to, luckily, having the ball misplayed directly to him). The referee must have a feel for the game, how it has been going, how it is going now. That "feel" must be applied to each and every situation individually. There is no black-and-white formula to follow.

Under the Law, the offending team is required to back off at least 10 yards from the spot of the ball immediately. Most do not. The referee should stop the restart process only if it is clear that the kicking team either does not want or cannot take a quick kick. Section 13.3 of the USSF publication "Advice to Referees on the Laws of the Game" tells us that "The referee should move quickly out of the way after indicating the approximate area of the restart and should do nothing to interfere with the kicking team's right to an immediate free kick. At competitive levels of play, referees should not automatically "manage the wall," but should allow the ball to be put back into play as quickly as possible, unless the kicking team requests help in dealing with opponents infringing on the minimum distance." However, the referee cannot abdicate the responsibility to ensure that the free kick is indeed "free."

Finally, this is the way things should be done at competitive levels of play (which one would presume U18 girls coached by a referee would be). Only at a much younger level might the referee step in on his own initiative, unasked, to enforce the required distance and then only if it was clear from the body language that the kicker was perplexed by opponents being too close.