

JOE KNOWS AYSO Summer 2006

Joe Eldridge, National Referee Administrator

AYSO frequently receives questions regarding rules, regulations, policies, interpretation of FIFA Law and AYSO modifications. In my position as National Referee Administrator, I am often asked to respond. The following are some of the interesting questions I recently received. If you have questions, please contact me, Joe Eldridge, at (888) 686-2976 or by e-mail at joeeldridge@ayso.org.

Question:

Dear Joe,

I have a question about referee positioning during the game and thought perhaps you would be kind enough to share your views.

I saw an assessor giving it to the referee he was assessing about stepping off the field into touch, during the match on a throw-in. The assessor said (words to the effect) that the referee should never go off the field in a match (unless of an emergency), and that the better place to view a throw-in was from the field.

Then I saw several national referees (here locally) standing off the field to watch the play in the two circumstances as follows:

1) To observe the players on a corner kick where the ball was not kicked from the AR side.

The ref stood off the field next to the goal post and watched the players facing the field.

Upon inquiry about that move, I was told two things by national refs who liked or approved of the referee going off field to observe the players in such an event as a corner kick. Those statements were *something like*:

"I like to get down deep to show the players I am there and I can see what they are doing"

the other national referee said *something like*:

"there is no better position to see what is going on in a situation like this other than to be looking directly at the players from the position standing off the field by the goal post, but with younger players, they may kick it wrong and you get hit with the ball".

2) To observe a throw in on the other side of the field from the AR side down close to the 18 yard line or closer to the corner flag.

Those same two national AYSO referee said they had frequently used this sort of position when they thought it was helpful "to get a quick restart", or for some other reason.

Now there is a difference of opinion from people I know and respect. I am not looking for a confrontation, but rather to have the lights turned on for me so I can be a better referee and help others along the way....

Actually I have seen 3 national referees standing off the field to observe play during a game in which they were officiating, now that I think about it.

Any advice for me about a referee standing off the field so he or she is "in touch" so to say, to get a better view or a quick restart?

Thank you very much.

Scott

Answer:

Hi Scott,

Thank you for your question about referee positioning. As Ken Aston used to say when asked about referee positioning, "Don't be an automatic referee. Be a stick shift referee". He also said referees should avoid using the words "always" and "never" when discussing positioning. There are no hard and fast rules about referee positioning. Simply put, the referee should take up a position to best view the next anticipated action which is commonly referred to as "reading the game and anticipating play". There are lots of variables to consider such as; the age and skill of the players, the condition of the field, the position of the sun, do I have qualified Assistant Referees, the time and score of the game, the weather, the tempo of the game, am I fit enough to recover, etc., etc.

An assessor should judge the effectiveness of the referee's choice of positioning based on what ultimately happens and the proximity of the referee to that resulting action. Assessors should not base their opinion of the referee's position on preconceived notions of what is and is not the "right" position. If the referee has selected a position which puts him/her in a good position to see or even prevent an infraction (presence lends conviction) then his/her positioning decision was a good one.

There are many options referees have for positioning and a referee who more often than not is well positioned to view important events during the game is making good positioning decisions. No referee is perfect and will occasionally find himself/herself out of position. If the referee is reading the game and anticipating play correctly, then he/she will most likely be making the "right" decisions about positioning. Assessors should judge the effectiveness of the referee's positioning decisions based on the overall effectiveness of the referee to be in the best position to manage the match in general. An occasional ineffective positioning decision is inevitable.

It is a relatively common practice for good referees to occasionally position themselves off the field of play to be in the best position to view the anticipated action and to avoid interfering with that action. A referee who decides to step off the field over the goal line during a corner kick and then has a clear and unobstructed view of a resulting infraction

which occurs right in front of the goal has made a good positioning decision. On the other hand, a referee who decides to step off the field over the goal line during a corner kick that is quickly intercepted and cleared down the field resulting in an immediate counter attack and shot on the goal at the far end of the field will find himself/herself in a poor position 60 or more yards away from play. A referee who steps off the field to observe a throw-in may well be in the best position to view the resulting action which occurs in the immediate vicinity of the throw-in without interfering with play. On the other hand, however, a referee who steps off the field to observe a throw-in may find himself/herself in a poor position to view the action when the thrower does a flip throw-in and the ball ends up 40 or more yards away in front of the goal where some questionable challenges are occurring in the penalty area.

So, is stepping off the field a good positioning decision for the referee? You pay your money and you take your chances. Referee positioning is a guessing game played by the referee who is attempting to read the game and anticipate the next action. Assessors need to wait and see if the referee's guesses work out more often than not because there is no consistently "right" position... and that's my position.

Thanks,

Joe