

REALISTIC MATCH CONTROL 'BE THE BOSS'

By
Bob Spiller

If you are taking the trouble to read this significant contribution, relating '**realistic match control - -- be the boss**', and then please continue to read and enjoy the experience.

Why, 'be the boss' you may ask. Well, as the referee in charge of the game, you will be expected to know just about everything and for some inexplicable reason the saying, "ask the ref ---- he will know", has become a common occurrence. And true enough the referee really does, more often than not, supply an appropriate answer. Hence, it gives the referee some credibility of being the boss for which he/she can then build on and develop when the game gets underway.

To, being the boss, and successfully managing a variety of situations in order to achieve a realistic level of match control, you will need to be mentally tuned and physically primed. Moreover, your attitude of both mind and body and your high expectations relating your standard of performance in every game you officiate, must be --- This is my game plan and I will control everything.

THE EARLY STAGES OF THE GAME

Once the kick-off takes place it is not uncommon for the teams to metaphorically spar with each other during the opening 5 to 10 minutes until the players settle into some form of rhythm having got a feel of the ball at some stage or another. It is in these critical opening minutes that the referee must be fully alert and at the very least, expect the unexpected to occur and be prepared to establish an authoritative approval over the proceedings as to the manner in which it is intended to control the game.

- When the two teams commence the match, unscripted events and situations develop throughout the game and it will be up to you as the referee to control the players to respond to what you want them to do in accordance with law.
- You will need to be one step ahead of the participating players at all times, anticipating their actions and taking decisive action as required. It is easy to punish, but you need to manage the game by asserting your authority in a commanding manner.
- Be sure to take every opportunity to establish your tolerance level of authority by decisively and justifiably penalising offences, and if necessary, reprimand the guilty player to send a clear message to all the other players that you will not tolerate such unlawful or unsporting actions. Such positive and justified disciplinary measures may well have an influential bearing on the behaviour of the players in the latter stages of the game.
- If severe disciplinary actions are warranted, such as a caution or even a dismissal from the field of play, then be brave enough to carry out the requirement. You will be setting out your stall in the early stages as will the players be summing you up to see how strong and authoritative you are going to be. For your own benefit please do not disappoint them.

RESTARTS IN PLAY

When considering restarts in play there are those which come into the category of **fixed restarts** which encompass goal kicks, corner kicks, penalty kicks and of course the kick off and those which are **variable restarts** which are associated with free kicks anywhere within the field of play and throw-ins along the touch lines. Restarting play with a **drop ball** procedure could also be

classified as a variable restart with the exception that it becomes a fixed position when the ball is to be dropped on the area goal line, then arguably, it becomes a fixed restart.

- Every restart in play has the potential to ruin the game and where the laws can be manipulated to suit the instigator and so gain an unfair advantage over the opponents. Whenever there is a stoppage in play (ball out of play) this will be the time to be extra vigilant and watchful for acts of unsporting behaviour. There will be a need to be proactive to prevent any unnecessary delays in restarting the game. Be firm and in control of the situation. The law relating any one of the restarts is clear. If the restart is illegally infringed in any manner and justifies an offending player or players' receiving a caution then so be it. Boss the restart situation as required.

DEALING WITH THROW-IN PROCEDURES

When throw-in situations are encountered be proactive to help players help themselves by clearly identifying which side is entitled to the throw-in and from where **you** want the throw-in to be taken. Supplemented by a loud call of --- **That will do you --- Thank you player** or words to that effect. Leave both teams in no doubt as to which side is entitled to the throw-in. Once this has been established, get the attention of the players and focus on the player who is going to take the throw-in. If the player fails to confirm to your request then apply Law.

- Be sure to assert your authority to prevent the player taking the throw-in, after blatantly or otherwise, encroaching along the touch line and stealing metres to gain an advantage.
- Do be mindful of what actions you need to adopt to retain credibility by preventing problems and turning throw-in situations to your own advantage ---- Be the Boss.
- There will be a definite requirement to raise the awareness level when throw-ins are taken by either side at any point along the touch line.
- Clamp down hard on the very first throw-in and then be consistent in your actions with all subsequent throw-ins.

RECOGNISABLE PROBLEMS

Typical are the problems associated with the taking of a throw-in, which need to be kept in mind and controlled accordingly, are briefly defined in the following bullet points:

- Defending player takes possession of the ball and in doing so significantly delays surrendering it a player on the opposing side so that the throw-in cannot be taken too quickly.
- Player shapes up to indicate he will take the throw-in, but then significantly pauses to give the ball to his colleague to take the throw-in. The colleague on taking the ball had also encroached along the touch line over a number of metres.
- Player taking the throw-in encroaches along the touch line in a surreptitious manner, pausing briefly and then threatening to make the throw-in, but delays and repeats his actions over again, on the pretence of looking for a colleague to throw the ball to but trying to seek an unfair advantage by doing so.
- Watch out for an opponent who deliberately tries to distract or impede the thrower by standing closer to him than the permitted two metres.
- Be alert to situations where a player of one side has the ball and refuses to let it go when the player of the opposing team takes steps to retrieve the ball, generating a possible flash point.

DEALING WITH FREE KICKS

Always bear in mind the award of a free kick is to compensate the non-offending team for an offence committed by their opponents which denied the non-offending team the advantage in the first instance.

It matters not, from where on the field of play, the free kick is to be taken by either team, efficient and firm, authoritative supervision, particularly when the ceremonial wall free kick scenario's are encountered, will be paramount for the enhancement of match control.

- Be prepared to allow for quick free kicks to be taken, depending of course, on the temperature of the game and the players willingness and attitude to accept quick free kicks. This expedient, however, would not be advisable where a free kick has been awarded to the defending team within their last third of the playing area.
- Most important after stopping play is to arrive early on the scene where the free kick will be taken, in order to take control and supervise the free kick procedure.
- With the exception of the quickly taken free kick, always enforce the stipulated 9.15m distance on the opposing team members, but do not labour the requirement to the point of being pedantic or over fussy.
- Apply common sense and do not be too pedantic on ball placement for the free kick to be taken.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

During the taking of free kicks many potential problems can arise which need to be quickly recognised and sorted before they can have an undermining influence on the match control. For example, the ceremonial wall free kick procedures can often be problematic and will need to be tightly supervised. There are a number of recognised proven procedures which can be applied to control the walled free kicks but as a general guide the following problems can be associated with the taking of such free kicks:

- A defending player quickly and deliberately fields the ball and is slow to surrender the ball to you for the kick to be taken, with the sole purpose of buying time for his colleagues to regroup and form the defensive wall.
- A defending player surreptisously taps the ball so that it travels a few metres or more away from the location of the free kick in order to unsettle the opponents and particularly, the kicker, when attempting to place the ball for the free kick.
- The defending player deliberately standing in front of where the free kick is to be taken to direct the colleagues in the wall formation, at the same time delaying the kick to be taken.
- One or two attacking players, standing either in front of the wall formation or trying to muscle into the wall line out. This spells danger and designed to create panic, friction and disruption of the defenders in the wall with pushing and holding becoming manifest.
- An attacking player positioning himself at the end of the wall and then linking arms with the last defender and reeling away to drag the wall out of alignment at the very moment the ball is kicked.
- A designated defender (a charger) the moment before the ball is kicked breaks from the wall line out and charges towards the kicker and hopefully to intercept the ball.
- Sort the problems out immediately by being fully proactive and warning the players concerned that you will not tolerate such behaviour, rather than just being reactive.

- If necessary, be selfish about your game plan. Allow no spoiling antics by both attackers and defenders when defensive wall line outs are encountered. Quickly and clinically identify any trouble makers and warn or discipline them as to their behaviour.

FLASH POINTS and "OFF THE BALL" ACTIVITIES

Although the Laws of the Game are so framed as to encourage those participants taking part in a football match to experience **Equality, Enjoyment and Safety**, the game nevertheless remains essentially a bodily contact sport.

Therefore, when taken to extremes, due to over enthusiasm, competitiveness and a desire to win at all costs, it will become inevitable that some form of physical aggression will replace level headedness and stabilised activities. In other words, during the game, at some stage or another, flash points or even "off the ball" activities, generally involving a player from each team confronting each other, will be the outcome.

When such situations arise they must be instantly defused to prevent the manifestation of a possible mass player confrontation becoming a major problem. The best and most efficient manner in which to deal with such incidents as flash points and "off the ball" incidents will be by experience gained in the art of man-management techniques.

- Be alert to recognise the initial development of any potential flash point/confrontation or an "off the ball" incident. Do not try to manage and diffuse such potential confrontations from a distance. Arrive on the scene as quickly as possible. **Remember presence is power.**
- Impose your authority in a firm and commanding manner on the players involved and discipline them accordingly.
- When a potential flash point occurs, do not wait for the outcome by standing and observing the exchanges. With any flash point or "off the ball" activity, presence can be an effective deterrent.
- Also be sure to use the voice and the whistle to your advantage.
- Read the pattern of play and gauge the temperature of the game and the attitude of the players. Enforce the laws and apply them in a consistent and sensible manner and be forever prepared to tighten or slacken your grip of authoritativeness when considered safe to do so.
- Finally, presence helps to prevent ---- Be there!!!

BALL IN THE CORNER

The laws of the game allow for a player to prevent an opponent from gaining possession of the ball by imposing his body between the opponent and the ball, thus technically "shielding the ball" provided the ball remains within playing distance of the player acting as the shield. However, when this **ball in the corner** scenario develops within the corner flag arc quadrant, the shielding player desperately trying to consume time as well as to prevent the opponent from getting to the ball, warning bells should be ringing. For such a situation will be fraught with complications and can quickly degrade into a free for all with both players pushing, holding and even kicking out in frustration, thus leading up to a flash point situation.

- The very instant the ball in the corner scenario develops, be fully alert to what could unfold and be prepared to intervene with a common sense approach.

- Make every effort to arrive at the scene of the action as quickly as possible to verbally encourage the combating players to get the ball into open space.
- Do be aware of the pattern of play which leads up to the ball in the corner activity and maintain a peripheral view of play rather than tunnel vision

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Having now read this contribution, I hope the contents have given you food for thought and I leave you with the “magnificent seven” steps which will significantly contribute to the achievement of realistic match control.

- Formulate your game plan and execute it without fear or favour.
- During the game, never wait for things to happen.
- Presence is power --- Be there with an authoritative impact.
- Be proactive throughout the game.
- Enforce and apply the laws in a consistent and sensible manner.
- Always remain one step ahead of the players.
- Finally, be the “Boss.”

© Bob Spiller
August 2006