

CONSISTENCY in APPLICATION of the LAWS

By
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BACK GROUND PRE-AMBLE

Having given the signal to start the game, the referee's main objective then becomes one of controlling the match proceedings by initially establishing control and then maintaining that control throughout the game. To achieve this criterion, the referee will need to exercise full communication and player-management skills with meaningful interpretation and consistent application of the Laws of the Game. However, when conducting these combined requirements the participating players will expect some level of consistency in both decision making and subsequent disciplinary actions taken by the referee. This is quite understandable, since the general bone of contention regarding a referee's performance frequently raises the question relating to consistency, or more often than not, the inconsistency of decisions made and actions taken.

INTRODUCTION

The dictionary describes the word consistency as being ----“**consistent to same principles of thought and action**” and when related to a Referee's on-field performance, consistency becomes a significant factor. It is, of course, appreciated that the achievement of total consistency relating to the Application of the Laws of the Game may never be fully realised during the course of a game and from one referee's performance to another. Nevertheless, as referees' we can take significant steps to improve this situation which will entail after each game an honest and critical self assessment analysis of our personal performance. The aim being to try to identify the incidents which occurred during the game which also led to decisions and actions being taken, and were such activities carried out in a consistent manner.

PENALISATION OF OFFENCES

Instant recognition relating to acts of unfair play with respect to the interpretation and accurate judgement of both penal and technical offences and the severity, in which such challenges are made, will be an essential requirement if consistency is to be achieved.

PENAL OFFENCES: Unfair challenges, when committed in a physical manner such as careless, reckless or excessive force must be penalised with a positive response with the offending player being punished as required by Law. This course of action may only result in the referee awarding a direct free kick or a penalty kick to the opposing team. However, if the challenge is interpreted to warrant some measure of disciplinary action such as the quiet word, the stern word, the public rebuke, the caution or the ultimate dismissal, the appropriate level of punishment must be applied.

Whichever course of action is deemed necessary at the time of the incident leading up to the offence, repetition of such occurrences will deserve to be dealt with in a similar manner. That is apart from those situations where the application of the 'quiet word' to the offender approach would suffice, without fear of any possible retribution by the offending player or his team mates. It would be totally inexcusable if acts of unfair challenges were to go unpunished.

Of the ten penal offences quoted in Law 12 handling the ball becomes an offence only when the act is carried out in a deliberate manner. Occasions do arise where it becomes impossible for a player to avoid handling the ball as he/she has insufficient time to withdraw the hand or arm before the ball strikes him/her. Such non-deliberate handling should not be penalised no matter where it occurs on the field. The definition of 'hand' in the context of Law 12 includes the whole arm from shoulder joint to hand.

PERSISTENT INFRINGEMENT: The need to be alert to the occurrence of persistent infringement cannot be over emphasised. The offences may be petty or less obvious in character; however the guilty player should be cautioned if he/she persistently infringes the Laws of the Game. It is not possible to define persistence in terms of actual number of fouls committed but when an offender commits three or four penal offences in close succession, the possibility of disciplinary action

must be considered. To monitor possible persistent offenders, the referee will need to concentrate and memorise such an offender probably by making a mental note of his/her shirt number or by any personal characteristic that will aid accurate recall.

THE ADVANTAGE CLAUSE: Some schools of thought advocate the strong disciplinarian approach to acts of unfair play during the first 5 – 10 minutes into the game, letting nothing go, lecturing players and even issuing cautions in order to establish control. Then having done so significantly relaxes the control and liberally applies the advantage clause. Such an approach can be regarded as an inconsistency. However, in the case of contact fouls, if the referee reads the players intentions and actions correctly, there is no reason why the application of advantage should not be encouraged during the early stages of the game.

For the sake of consistency, the advantage clause should only be applied where circumstances permit and without sacrificing the match control element. If acts of unfair play are considered to be serious enough to warrant an instant stoppage in the game with the award of a free kick, then so be it. The need to be fully aware of physical challenges resulting in danger to the player being challenged and the way such challenges are viewed and punished accordingly will also be of extreme importance with respect to consistency in decision making.

TECHNICAL OFFENCES: Acts of offences which are far less severe than penal offences but still demand careful consideration as to what constitutes a consistency of penalisation. Technical offences come under impeding an opponent, charging fairly at the wrong time, playing in a dangerous manner and the five specific offences committed by the goalkeeper. All of these technical offences being punished by the award of an indirect free kick.

UNFAIR IMPEDING: When a player who unfairly impedes the progress of an opponent by crossing directly in front of him/her and the ball, or intervening so as to form an obstacle with the objective of delaying his/her advancement must be punished by the award of an indirect free kick. The referee will need to be alert and watchful when these situations arise to note if any physical contact is made between the players involved and if so who is pushing and who is holding. Impeding must not be confused with the situation when a player is technically shielding the ball with this body, the ball remaining within playing distance of the player acting as the shield.

CHARGING: A player may shoulder charge an opponent who has the ball within playing distance in a fair manner without fear of being penalised. However, if the ball is not within playing distance but the shoulder charge is made in a fair manner, this would result in an indirect free kick being awarded to the opponent's team.

DANGEROUS PLAY: In the opinion of the referee any player considered to be playing in a manner likely to be dangerous to an opponent shall be punished by the award of an indirect free kick to the opponent's team. The scissors kick or overhead bicycle kick is a clear example of the importance of judging an action according to the situation in which it is performed.

A player kicks or attempts to kick the ball by the technique described with no other player close by should not be penalised for dangerous play. The same action with a player nearby however, then this could be classified as dangerous play and would be punishable with the award of an indirect free kick.

Kicking or attempting to kick the ball whilst in the goalkeeper's possession is universally considered to be an act of dangerous play and should be punished accordingly. Goalkeeper when advancing to catch the ball sometimes raise their leg in an outward direction to keep opposing players at a distance.

If an opponent is in close proximity to the goalkeeper, the referee may well consider such action constitutes careless or even reckless play but if the opponent is further away then it would be deemed dangerous play and punished accordingly.

FITNESS AND MOVEMENT

The ability to move quickly and fluently around the field of play from one position to another in order to achieve clear viewing angles of committed offences and possible confrontational situations can be classified as an important ingredient toward the achievement of consistency. It is an accepted fact the closer the referee is to an incident the more likely the decision given will be accepted without question. For example, a decision given from 5 – 10 metres will be more readily accepted than one given from 30 metres or more, even though it may be the correct decision.

With this in mind, it will be of extreme importance for the referee to make every endeavour to be on the scene and to appreciate the problems that may occur if he/she were not there. Remember the further away from an incident the less credibility the decision will have and the less effective the match control. A distinct lack of fitness will restrict ease of movement and therefore sacrificing good positioning, which can bring about an inconsistency in decision making which will affect the referee's overall performance. It is therefore, an essential requirement for the referee to work on his/her level of fitness to develop both staying power and quick fluent movements in order to achieve commendable viewing angles close to the active play.

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

In Law 5 'The Referee' and Law 12 'Fouls and Misconduct' the referee is given the authority to take disciplinary sanctions, from the moment he/she enters the field of play until he/she leaves the field of play after the final whistle. However, only a player or substitute or substituted player may be shown the yellow or red card. Law 12 is quite specific with regard to what merits a caution as opposed to what merits a sending off and lists the seven cautioning offences with an additional three cautions applicable to a substitute or substituted player with the seven offences for which a player, substitute or substituted player may be sent off.

Therefore, any player, substitute or substituted player who indulges in misconduct to such an extent that they deserve to be cautioned and shown the yellow card or dismissed from the field of play and shown the red card, such disciplinary sanctions must be taken. By doing so you will be seen to be consistent.

Acts of unsporting behaviour, dissent by word and/or action, serious foul play, denial of an 'obvious' goal scoring opportunity, use of offensive or insulting or abusive language and /or gestures to name but a few would all require sanctioning. There should be no excuse whatsoever for not enforcing the Laws in terms of the required disciplinary sanctions. From the moment the players step onto the field and the substitutes take to the bench until the end of the game becomes due, they are subjected to disciplinary sanctions, if they indulge in misconduct and infringe the Laws. No matter what time period during the game, if the need arises to either caution or dismiss from the field an offender or offenders then such course of action must be executed promptly and efficiently.

In the early stages of the game if a player commits an offence which warrants a caution and another player commits an identical offence near the end of the game, he/she too must, for the sake of consistency, be cautioned. The referee throughout the game must be seen by everyone to be enforcing the Laws and the appropriate disciplinary sanctions fairly and positively without fear or favour.

In the case of players expressing disagreement to decisions in the form of dissent by word and /or gesticulations, such behaviour must not be tolerated. Those players who express dissent by verbal outbursts, passing comment and making expressive gesticulations as a protest or disagreement to any decision given must be dealt with accordingly. It is not enough to take some form of disciplinary action against dissent in one situation and on another, allow the dissent to go unpunished. Such an inconsistency in reaction and non-reaction in terms of dealing with offending player(s) will lead to loss of respect and ultimately the erosion of match control.

Whenever such objectionable behaviour becomes manifest, it will be of paramount importance to act quickly to deal out the merited punishment as required in Law. Having confirmed an

authoritative standard it will then be of equal importance to retain consistently throughout the game.

STOPPAGES and RESTARTS

SIGNALS: When ever play is stopped or the ball goes out of play signals become an essential aid to communication which can speak volumes for your attitude of mind and your body language. Make sure the signals are crisp and positive in execution. For example, the throw-in signal given with an outstretched arm and flat open hand level with the shoulder. Goal kick indicated with an out stretched arm slightly lowered from the shoulder with the palm of the flat open hand facing down to the ground dictating a dominant action. "I am awarding a goal kick and no arguments, end of story". Corner kicks and free kicks indicated with an outstretched arm with flat open hand the arm raised above the shoulder.

In the case of the throw-in the arm signal can be supplemented whenever possible by a loud shout to who has the throw and clearly indicating from where you want the throw to be taken. This action will immediately stamp your authority on the situation thus hopefully avoiding possible confusion. No need to be too pedantic from where the throw is to be taken suffice to say be guided by your common sense. Always be consistent in your actions relating to throw-ins, since any lapse of concentration or failure to be fully informative with both arm signal and voice will contribute to a loss of match control.

During any stoppage in the game (dead ball time) for whatever reason, this is the time when the referee has to be on his utmost guard and remain fully focused on all that unfolds until the game is restarted. In other words once the play is underway the players will be concentrating on the game rather than what problems can they generate.

An awareness of players indulging in acts of 'unsporting behaviour' to gain an unfair advantage may be carried out and expressed in many forms and guises for example the clever practice of acting 'simulation' comes to mind . A simulating act carried out by a player with the intention to deceive the referee. However, the referee should in his/her own mind be 100% certain that the player has indeed, simulated (feigned) an unfair challenge. The referee must be convinced that there has been no physical contact whatsoever by the player challenging for the ball.

Acts of unsporting behaviour are, in the main, encountered when there are stoppages in play and when restarts in play are to take place. The referee must be fully alert of the manifestation of such acts which must be instantly recognised with the appropriate action being taken in a consistent manner to eradicate repetition.

Restarting play with the award of a free kick is another area where inconsistency can be prevalent if the referee allows such scenarios to become so. The award of free kicks in mid-field is generally the easiest to deal with in terms of controlling the procedure for the kick to be taken. The most likely problem the referee could expect to encounter would be where an opponent stands closer to the kicker than the required 9.15m distance. A practice often carried out to delay the kick to allow his team mates to regroup and moreover, to test the referee's tolerance level, especially when the first few free kicks are taken.

The closer free kicks for the attacking team get to their opponents' penalty area the more critical the control of such free kicks become. For example, the formation of the defensive wall lineout with the mandatory 9.15 metre distance from the ball. Consistency in controlling free kicks, no matter where on the field they are to be taken, will demand strict supervision and Law enforcement. At the first free kick, firmly establish the intention of making sure the opposing players are respecting the 9.15 metre requirement.

Once having set the 'benchmarks', adhere to the same principles throughout the game for the taking of subsequent free kicks. The key to a successful pattern of consistency for controlling free kicks will be to read the game and be guided by the players' reactions and attitudes. The players will soon make it clear whether or not quick free kicks are the order of the day or otherwise.

While on the subject of quick free kicks, total awareness must be the watchword when there is a defensive wall lineout scenario. If the team offended against want a quick free kick the referee should be well prepared to accept this restart provided he/she is ready. Otherwise strict enforcement of the stipulated 9.15 metre requirement with the free kick taken in accordance with the Law will be required. With all free kicks however, do be seen to be consistent in supervising the free kick procedure and be consistent in all that you do.

All too often where play is restarted, acts of player encroachment are carried out with the deliberate intention of gaining an unfair advantage which not only disrupts the progress of the restart in play it becomes a blatant offence against the spirit of the game. Defined as **'opponents standing closer than the prescribed distance at the start or at any restart in the game'**.

Referees' must make players aware that attempts to indulge in acts of encroachment and indeed unsporting behaviour to gain an unfair advantage, offending the spirit of the game, will not be tolerated and such acts will be punished accordingly in a consistent manner.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The question of consistency relating to a referee's performance has been discussed in terms of identifying areas where inconsistency in decision making and subsequent disciplinary measures can occur to the detriment of match control. The password for every referee in every game therefore must always be consistency. This can be achieved by increasing our knowledge of the 'Laws of the Game' and the manner in which they are interpreted and applied in practical match play situations. The question you need to ask yourself at the end of each game should be ----
Was I consistent in my performance today? If, yes well done. If no, why not.

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March 2007