



To: National Referees
National Instructors
National Assessors
State Referee Administrators
State Directors of Instruction
State Directors of Assessment

From: Alfred Kleinaitis
Manager of Referee Development and Education

Subject: **The Officiating Team**
Increasing Communication Effectiveness

Date: February 21, 2007

With the approach of the 2007 season, it is critical that all officials consider carefully how to maximize the effectiveness of their communications as a team. Only then will we best be able to serve both the game and the players.

The effectiveness of the officiating team depends on all members understanding their respective responsibilities, tasks, and duties. Each official must rely upon the other members of the team to perform their duties in a timely, accurate, and responsible manner. Reviewing these responsibilities and clarifying how they are to be performed is one of the central purposes of the pre-game conference (***Guide to Procedures***, “General Mechanics”).

Before The Referee Has Made A Decision

This is the stage at which input from the officiating team can be most effective because it can *prevent rather than correct* problems. There is less damage done to the overall authority of the officiating team if the referee is able to gather as much relevant detail as possible *before reaching a decision*.

The pre-game conference must develop an understanding by all members of the team regarding the importance of making eye contact before any significant decision is made or announced and the specific signals by which the assistant referees and fourth official can provide relevant information. Among the issues for which the referee may need assistance is the possibility of

- a second caution,
- the occurrence of misconduct in addition to a foul,
- the level of severity of the misconduct, or
- the unnoticed involvement of other persons in the foul or misconduct.

After The Referee Has Made A Decision But Not Yet Restarted Play

The major responsibility here is to prevent a serious error from occurring. Because a decision has already been reached, announced, and perhaps even partially implemented, the officiating team will likely encounter resistance if something different eventually needs to be done.

Accordingly, an assistant referee or fourth official should act only if he or she has seen some element of the events on the field which there is strong reason to believe **would have likely resulted in a different decision if it had been seen**. The objective is to “get it right” while there is still time to correct matters. Among the potentially serious errors which the officiating team should prevent are:

- The failure to give a red card following the issuance of a second caution
- The display of a card to the wrong player
- The display of a wrong card to a player
- The failure to punish instigating behavior in addition to any retaliation
- An action which is contrary to the Laws of the Game or to local rules of competition
- An incorrect determination that a goal was scored or not
- Violent conduct has occurred which carries the threat of further serious misconduct

The pregame conference needs to include a discussion of increasingly noticeable and varied means of gaining the attention of the referee, of how other members of the team can assist in redirecting attention to the official who has relevant information, and how the needed information can be conveyed as quickly, unobtrusively, and efficiently as possible. The longer this process takes, the greater is the possibility of resistance and eroded authority.

After A Decision Has Been Taken And Play Restarted

The only decision which can be corrected at this point is the failure to show a red card following a second caution. However, any of the errors listed above should be brought to the attention of the referee at the earliest possible opportunity as the information may be used by the referee to recover some measure of authority through player management strategies.

Because the most likely opportunity is the next stoppage, the pregame should include an emphasis again of making eye contact at any stoppage as well as the means that could be employed to gain the referee’s attention if important information needs to be provided. The assistant referee or fourth official may decide that, under the circumstances, the better alternative might be to wait for the end of a period of play to discuss any of these matters with the referee.

Communications Procedures

When information must be conveyed, the first line of communication is the array of standard signals described in the ***Guide to Procedures***. If these are inadequate and direct communication is needed, assistant referees and fourth officials must compose their message quickly and focus on the essential facts needed by the referee – e.g., card color, team, player name or number, and reason under the Law for the recommendation (further detail should be at the request of the referee).

If it is necessary for members of the officiating team to confer directly, they must remember that they are doing so in an atmosphere of high tensions, considerable interest in the substance of the conversation, and the possibility of further misconduct. Accordingly, their attention must continue to focus on the field and players. *These conversations must be private* – the desire of others to participate or be nearby must be strongly discouraged. Further, officials should not allow themselves to be drawn into any subsequent statements or explanations of what was said.

Fourth officials should first seek to communicate with the referee through the near assistant referee but, if necessary, direct contact with the referee may be needed in order to ensure that all relevant information has been made available.

The essence of the diagonal system of control is communication, including the sharing of relevant, accurate, and timely information. As a team, the officials must use all available techniques to make the right decision.