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Refs on top of the action: How to position

By Randy Vogt

The referee's diagonal that he or she runs goes from corner flag to corner flag.

Actually, a referee who strictly adheres to this diagonal will miss seeing a number of fouls. I like to think that the referee's positioning isn't a diagonal as much as it is a *modified* version of a half-open scissor -- corner flag to corner flag and penalty arc to penalty arc. The referee is not a slave to this positioning, but it is a rough guide to follow, especially for the newer referee.

I have seen many youth soccer games when the referee made an important call -- sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly -- and loud dissent followed since the ref was 40 yards away from the play. I have seen just as many games in which the call was completely missed by an out-of-position referee.

Just as with phones, long-distance calling can be very expensive. The preventive officiating technique is to be fit enough and to hustle each game so that you are close to the play.

Teams are much more likely to dissent from referee decisions when the ref is far away than with the same decision when the ref is 5-10 yards from the ball. After all, presence lends conviction.

Should you blow the whistle for a foul in which you are too far from the infraction, continue running to the point of the restart. You will appear to be closer to the play than the ref who simply blows the whistle and stands there.

During the course of the game, you might encounter 1-2 players on each team who are causing problems. Modify your diagonal so that every time one of these players receives the ball, you are less than 10 yards away. Players rarely commit fouls when the referee is right there.

The Assistant Referee's Position

During normal play for nearly the entire game, the assistant referee's position is parallel with the second-to-last defender. The first defender is almost always the goalkeeper.

It is very challenging for new assistant referees to have the discipline to stay with the second-to-last defender instead of watching play develop 40 yards up field, especially when the ball is in or near the other penalty area. Half the challenge of being an assistant referee is having the discipline to be exactly in the correct position.

For example, should the other team take possession of the ball and launch a long pass to your half, you will know if the player running toward the ball is offside by being parallel to that second-to-last defender.

Should 21 players be in the other half of the field with only the goalkeeper in your half, the assistant referee's position is not with the second-to-last defender in this instance but at the halfway line.

Another exception to being parallel with the second-to-last defender is when the ball is closer to your goal line than the second-to-last defender is. Your position would then be parallel to the ball.

Other exceptions are during the taking of a corner kick and penalty kick. The assistant referee's position both times is at the goal line.

On a corner kick, the assistant ref is behind the corner flag.

On a penalty kick, the AR is at the intersection of the 18-yard line and the goal line.

Summarizing, the referee's perfect position can vary but the assistant referee's position almost always needs to be exactly in line with the second-to-last defender except with the situations noted above.

How Officials Position Themselves as a Team

Watch professional games and concentrate on the officials, paying special attention to their position and signals.

You will notice that referees like to keep the ball between them and an assistant referee. It's easier to officiate a match when there are two relatively close views, from different angles, of play around the ball.

You'll also see that referees often jog when play is in midfield, such as in or by the kickoff circle, and the ball might be 15 yards away. But referees sprint to get closer to the ball when it is in one of the "hot areas" such as in or by the penalty area or by the benches.

The penalty area is hot since it's by the goal and important goal-scoring opportunities happen there. The area in front of the benches is hot as coaches and substitutes have a close view of play by the touchline and will probably be upset should you miss something against their team.

(Randy Vogt has officiated over 7,000 games during the past three decades, from professional matches in front of thousandsto 6-year-olds being cheered on by very enthusiastic parents. In "Preventive Officiating," he shares his wisdom gleaned from thousands of games and hundreds of clinics to help referees not only survive but thrive on the soccer field. You can visit thebook's website at <http://www.preventiveofficiating.com/>)