

Game Control/Management

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The focus of the laws is to emphasize:

1. Good sportsmanship
2. Protecting players and image of the game (Fair Play)
3. Especially for the high school player, it is an educational experience which entails self-discipline, self-control and leadership (*this put pressure on the referee to enforce control)
4. Be aware coaches have wide range of ability and experience especially in youth matches and often only minimal understand of the rules of the game.

We all learn the laws of the game, but game management is a part of the game that develops with experience. Having a mentor can be very beneficial to a new referee's development and enjoyment of the game. Too many new officials burn out or just quit. It is not the easiest job in the world but can be enjoyable and fulfilling. How to manage a match is an entirely different topic. Hopefully there may be information to follow that will helpful. Guaranteeing consistency and uniformity in decisions. Reading the game (technical and tactical approach by each team)

Players are at an emotional age, so management is critical to game control. Bench control is needed at times as well. Vocal dissent/foul language from the bench needs prompt and consistent action by the referee. In the past I used the "ladder of control" but today the "ask, ask, tell" is easier to utilize, in my opinion.

Do not let the coach mock you such as point the other way consistently on your calls or constantly complaining. Need to send a message early to prevent problems that you will have if and when you start to lose control of the match. This doesn't mean an instant card to a coach (presently cards only show to high school coaches) but sometimes a quiet word is sufficient. But if persistent the coach can be sent off. Make sure you know how this is done and proper wording. Especially be clear, concise and accurate in your game report.

*Players on the field will reflect the attitude of their coach, which can be a very real problem.

AR's need the courage to enforce what the center wants and must be covered in the pre-game.

Suggestions and initial thoughts at the start of the match. Remember, even though you did this team last week, each match/player starts with a clean sheet not what they did in the last match. Don't pre-judge.

1. Positioning---where should I be? Where should the AR be? This is critical when the center is caught out of position. I guarantee that it will happen. ☺ The old adage is "presence lends conviction". Soccer understanding is needed for correct decisions. "Get the best angle" Being in the right place = correct decision.
2. Impact player(s) for both teams? Do we afford protection for the "star" player and are we aware who the "enforcers" are on each team? You should be able to identify them in the first 5 minutes of a match.
3. To reiterate this is an emotional sport with immature players.

So, what do we do in this match that has been so smooth? Minimal fouls and you are feeling pretty good about the job you are doing and maybe even just relaxing with the game flow. Then all heck breaks loose! My question to you is----could you sense or have a feeling something was coming? There is a feeling in every match that the center needs to be aware of. A good experienced center feels this and is ready to take control when needed.

The two main factors in loss of game control are intimidation by a player and ball watching by the officials!

Perhaps you are afraid to make the call for whatever reason or you did not stay with the play a second or two longer after ball played away and missed the serious foul that can ignite loss of control.

The natural tendency is for our eyes to follow the ball but take the time and make sure you see the action as a player passes the ball under pressure rather than instantly following the ball. Anticipation is the key! Most likely all will be fine, but this is an example where you need to be proactive. Hard unfair foul, even though his team kept possession (advantage), needs to be addressed to control the match. A quick decision if chance of scoring and then coming back to give the card is often the right thing to do in this situation. If not done I can almost guarantee that retaliation will happen, if not then somewhere in the match.

What to do if you sense game starting to get away from you!

We all have different approaches but sometimes there are alternatives to just start carding players. Granted the situation/foul may require a caution or send off due to the severity. However, if not, are there alternatives in your repertoire that

you might consider. It is a learning process and we will and have all made mistakes in the center. But remember it is a process and keep working at your game. Some thoughts that might be useful when this happens

1. Take over the tempo! More calls for lesser offenses
2. Blow whistle longer and louder (the whistle for game control is extremely underused). It is one of the things most obvious to me when watching the center. At times you cannot even hear the whistle. It is an important part of your presence.
3. Run on to more fouls. Especially where you have the feeling that bad things are going to happen. Whistle as you run if really needed. Get the players attention that you are serious.
4. Sweat a little more---sometimes, especially in the second half, we are too tired to make that run when we should. What can you do? Well perhaps don't go as deep after the first 5-10 minutes. Yes, it happens to all of us. Do the best you can and make sure to cover this with your AR's in the pre-game.
By this time, you should have a feeling on how the team is playing. Possession? Long flighted balls? All these affect your ability to stay with play.
5. Caution for dissent.
6. If there are two bad boys going at it then caution both.
7. Allow fewer advantage calls. If you feel like you are losing control, then call no advantage. Tighten things up and have a signal to your AR that you are doing so. Let them know at the pre-game. Personally, I like to use a hand signal, but verbal can work as well. Also, this serves to put players on notice.
8. If some of these options work, then lighten up again and hopefully there will be improved game flow.

In your "bag of management tricks" should be facial and hand expressions. These can convey a message to a player along with your whistle. (Body language) A shake of the head, raised eyebrows, stern look, use of hand, etc. Most all of you have kids so you should know that non-verbal communication could be just as expressive as the spoken word.

Cautions:

We have had discussions that our goal is to try and minimize cautions if at all possible. This works sometimes but not well at other times. My personal feelings, and believe me I have made all the mistakes, is that we are going to the caution a

wee bit too soon unless for sure it is a caution. This leads me into options to control the match short of cautions.

Options on a foul:

1. Ignore—don't deal with trifling fouls but be consistent to both teams
2. Verbal notice—in run of play you could say “ I saw that and knock it off”. Might still be in the trifling range or may be where calling the foul is necessary.
3. Warning—and this is underused in my opinion. You can stop play (and clock if you so choose); identify the player you want to “warn”. Quick word! You have made your point that “enough is enough”. Players and coaches are now aware, and you have put them on notice.
4. Call the foul
5. Caution
6. Send off
7. Terminate match (pretty extreme unless absolute loss of control)

This is a ladder of control and you can always use the caution or send off anywhere on the ladder as the situation demands. But always be consistent along the ladder for both teams.

Be able to recognize critical incidences in the match based on time!

Most goals scored in first 10 minutes of first half and last 5 minutes of first half. Same for second or right after a goal has been scored. Need to be more “with play” during these times.

After a hard foul is a critical time for retaliation so be especially watchful.

This is a good thing to communicate with your AR's that for the first 10 minutes I am going to be with play then “may” float more with the game. So, if a problem in your area that makes a difference you make the call. I will either agree or from my vantage point wave you down. *Of course, this depends on the experience of your AR's.

Remember our duty, as AR's is to inform. Some of us can get a little tired and slower to recover downfield as the game continues so this approach can be helpful. Good to talk about in pre-game!

Again, the situation may require being closer to play, so it all depends on match flow. If being good boys great, but bad boys then closer to play. (This is especially true with balls played into corner. 1v1 you can see quite well but if 2v1 or 3v1 you need to be closer to the action.)

AR's need to be aware that higher possibility of fouls occurring right after a team scores and/or after a hard tackle as mentioned for the center.

Keep track of player's number who is committing the fouls (or the majority of the fouls). I would recommend warning but if continues then caution for persistent infringement.

Ask AR's to help you keep track of who is doing the majority of fouls. AR's can inform centers "that is #9's third foul". Again, proactively verbally controlling the game. Player has now been warned. The center and players know what will come next if this continues. If it continues then you need to issue the card, or your warnings will not be taken seriously.

On a foul (2nd or 3rd by the same player) it is a good idea to hold up play before the free kick. Be aware not to take the opportunity for a quick kick away from the offended team. This is a verbal warning done as you point to the areas on the field where fouls occurred. This can be short of a caution, but player is again on notice and the next foul will result in a caution.

***Again, you are trying to keep him in the game but now it is up to him.

In talking to players, I have often used the approach of "I want to keep you in the game so knock it off"; another term might be "you are too good a player to be doing this so knock it off ". Playing to an ego works at times and at times does not. Just have to see if they will respond.

People management skills are essential vs. just throwing cards at players. But players need to heed the latitude you are giving them. If they are unable to respond, then no other choice. Remember this is an emotional sport and age!

Don't bait a player into a caution. You can set them up to fail and I have seen this happen. Don't have "rabbit ears". You will hear lots on the field so and try and deal with verbally, so you don't have to caution or send off.

Save the caution for the "right time" and "right situation"! Use cards with care. Not too many too soon. Use verbal control as much as possible. Later, when you really do have a cautionable offense, you may wish you had kept the first one in your pocket.

A few final thoughts concerning “rabbit ears”.

I would suggest have a wording you can use if you hear an “inadvertent” bad word and not sure what to do. Sure, it says to caution/send off in the “rule book” but in the spirit of the match could we do something else. Here are a couple of things you might use.

“If you pretend you didn’t say that I will pretend I didn’t hear it” “Find a new word” as you run by the player.

“I heard what you said and guessed you must be praying to be a better soccer player—right?”

You need to find what works for you. Need to show you are human and understand the emotional side of things. You can make your point without carding. Of course, if it is screamed across the field, etc. that is another story. I have seen and worked with officials that card an emotional uttering when a verbal warning should have been done. Again, it is an emotional sport so be as kind as possible with an inadvertent word.

Let’s look at another scenario that happens all the time. How do you deal with a “hard tackle that might lead to retaliation or does lead to a hard tackle the other way?” If managing the match this will happen so I might suggest a couple of choices.

1. I could give the free kick and could possibly card but trying not to unless warranted.

2. ****Whistle, stop the game and bring the two together. #4 you were hit hard on the tackle over there and then you did the same to #7 on the other team. You are now even, and I want no more of it.

“Do you understand”?

Again, verbal game control without carding. If they choose to ignore this warning, then it is on them.

Situation where both teams seem out of control and cards not helping!

Not what you expected to happen but what can you do? You could continue to flash plastic or could see if there might be an alternative.

**Stop match, bring both captains together (if you feel necessary bring the captains to the sideline and ask coaches to come as well)

Center “always faces the field while both AR’s watch players on the field.

In a “direct and no-nonsense manner you tell both teams to knock it off and play soccer. Very short and to the point.”

This is not a “discussion” and you are the only one talking.

No talking or reasons for whatever from the coaches or captain except “yes sir or I understand” then you re-start. Keep it polite, to the point and most of all do not lose your temper. You have done your best, without losing your temper, to manage this game for the enjoyment of all.

Never embarrass or humiliate a player. If issuing card go to a neutral place. Don’t say “here” as not a dog. We need to continue to be polite and remember that this is a game to be enjoyed by players, fans and the officials.

Many early fouls are to test the referee! Yes indeed! Or player kicks a ball to you to see if you have any skills when they are warming up. LOL You might not think much of this, but all is a testing to see what they might get away with. I personally really dislike seeing a ref demonstrating his juggling skills before a match. You are not a player but should be focused on your pre-game and pre-match duties.

So, let’s finish with some general information from perspective of players, coaches and fans. What we do is 90% visual and perception is reality.

1. Match time is set. Are we there on time or do we wander in 5 minutes before and still in street clothes? Change clothes in official’s area? No time for pre-game just glad we made it.
2. 90% of what we do is visual. Be comfortable in your image. Look at yourself in the mirror at home. How do you look? Practice your signals in mirror. Are they crisp and accurate? So often in accessing a game signals look sloppy. Often impossible to tell if center is signally for a direct, indirect, corner kick or just waving his arm around.
3. As AR you need to “run” down to the corner for corner kick then flag vs. trying to run and flag at the same time. Again, have clean sharp signals.
4. For all officials shoes polished, uniforms sharp, looking like a “team”.
5. Use the whistle as it was meant which is part of your game control. Not a weak little tweet that sends no message. Volume, intensity, etc. are part of that control. We are “not” trying to draw attention to ourselves but using as a critical aspect of match control. I described use of body language earlier as it is such an important part of match control.

6. AR's look sharp. Good eye contact with center. Good position of holding flags. No slouched standing with one hand on hip. You should be attentive and always ready for movement. If center does not make frequent eye contact, then tell him so at the half. We are a team!

Finally try and look like you are having fun. As officials we want to enjoy the game. Stern when appropriate. Smile when appropriate is just as important. Good Luck!