

Changes in Official Duties Are Here !

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“Things do not change; we change.” Henry David Thoreau, Walden

Daunting. Demanding. Difficult.

Some would say ‘the’ most difficult thing of its type, is to officiate competitive soccer games. Let’s look at trends in the laws, perhaps supporting this notion.

Roughly two decades ago, there was one paragraph and four International Board Decisions (IBD) listed. By contrast, Law 5 Referee, displayed 12 IBD’s and a dozen paragraphs of detail. The Referee was most important. Clearly. No mention of a 4th official. The referee did it all.

AR duties: to indicate ball out; which side is entitled to corner kick, goal kick or throw in; to ‘assist’ generally; to draw the referee’s attention to some rule infraction, ‘that the referee may not have seen. In the parlance of the day, those who were not the referee, said they were ‘running the line.’ Literally, a limited and a pedestrian self-portrait. The referee alone, was virtual king. The imperial referee ruled. Period. Pretty much alone, no matter how difficult.

Ten years later Law 6 was unchanged, except for indicating when a sub is wanted. By 1991, six supplementary items appeared, ‘Role of the 4th Official.’ It stated “...the 4th official has no status within the Laws of the game.” Old hands derisively referred to this role as, ‘maitre’d.’

Yet the game was changing. The Dutch and others played ‘total soccer.’ Speed in the game was electrifying. A modern game put pressure on static defenses. Overloading zone schemes. Quick counters. All players forward at the break.

Breakneck excitement. Uptempo. Defenses were attacked and taxed. Demanding context for a referee. Pressures were acute and keen. Fitness standards, age limits were imposed to enable the referee to keep up. But was it enough? Yes, daunting task.

Current laws, now have the Assistant Referee (AR- nee Linesman) with a functional title. Elevated status. The AR now indicates infractions out of the referee’s view; when the AR is closer- even in the sensitive penalty area. Even indicating when a keeper has moved during penalty kicks; AR’s may even enter field to help in wall situations. This is a dramatic shift from the sole arbiter style, to a true, meaningful duty approach.

The 4th official is now formally in the Laws. Expanded duties: indicating misconduct unseen by the other 3 officials; even errors in yellow or red card issuance, mistaken identity, etc. This too, is a radical turn, to a four official team.

What does this trend mean? Referees must be proactive in pregame. Must be during the game. Must encourage total participation of the team. Must assistants be prepared to 'get involved.' Yes !! They need to ask detailed questions in pregame; make suggestions.

Key that the 4th official watch the action, as a referee would. Misconduct in games is serious business. In certain leagues, cards carry consequences beyond the match. So it must be right. 4th officials have the duty to notice misconduct. Bench department. The 4th must keep the Referee or bench AR, from a need to deal with it. They have enough to do. The 4th must be proactive in keep in control. The Referee needs the help so his or her concentration is 99% inside the lines.

Referees: Rely on AR's and 4ths. Insist they get involved and interact with players, bench, and each other. Maximize eye contact and verbalize more. Talk. Be willing to change. Welcome help. Allow team members, to be involved; to get it right! AR's: take charge of your area. Interact with players on and off the field when necessary.

4th Official :deal with the benches, so Referee or AR does not have to. Be a settling influence. Roam the sideline. Make frequent visual 'connections' with the AR's & referee. Watch the game as if you were the referee. Note key players. Read potential problems on or off field. Keep book on all actions reportable. Make sure they are correct.

Assessores too will take note. Encourage involvement by AR's. Emphasize 4th official adoption of their expanded repsibituies. Assessors will also need to remind referees of their need to be assertive: encourage the total team effort. Assessors will ask: did everyone get involved to the best of their ability, to the benefit of the game.

The changes in the game and the laws are here. Now we all need to change for the good of the game. No matter how difficult the task, you cannot beat a team effort.

We referees, whatever our role, do take the challenge; there is no doubt. In the coming days, it is stills daunting, demanding, difficult.