

Law 5 - The Referee

REFEREE OBSERVATION REPORT

2019 FIFA Under-20 Championship – USA vs Ecuador **1:2 (1:2)**

Refereeing team:

Referee: Benoît Bastien (FRA)

Assistant Referee 1: Hicham Zakrani (FRA)

Assistant Referee 2: Frédéric Haquette (FRA)

Fourth Official: Abdelkhader Zitouni (TAH)

Fifth Official: Folio Moeaki (TGA)

Video Assistant Referee: Pol van Boekel (NED)

Assistant Video Assistant Referee: Paweł Raczkowski (POL)

Blog Observer: Osborne

A) Presentation of the match:

Quarterfinal USA-Ecuador was played at 5.30 pm at Gdynia Stadium, under a partly cloudy sky with 18°C. The pitch was in good condition, and attendance reached about 6,400 individuals.

The game was very open and both teams had several goal scoring opportunities. After a magnificent opening goal from ECU #8, USA equalised only 6 minutes afterwards. Ecuador then took the lead again right before half time. The action was checked by VAR for a potential offside. Second half did not change the final score and there were no match changing decision to be assessed from the French crew.

Benoît Bastien made it clear from the beginning that he was willing to let the game flow and stay in the background. The approach was shared by the players from both sides, who played fair throughout the entire game, with a limited level of dissent, no violent conducts and a low number of intentional fouls. The game heated up a little from 85' onwards, when Ecuadorian players defended ball possession from their opponents, who were desperately trying to level and reach extra time.

B) Referee performance

b1) Personality

Bastien displayed a calm attitude, trying to apply all the essential refereeing skills, without exaggeration in any field, keeping a good balance between a relaxed game management and a strict application of the rules. His communication was minimal and effective, starting from the “typical” early verbal warning before a corner kick (3'). He also warned ECU #10 at 27' for what was the closest foul to YC in the first 30 minutes.

b2) LotG application

A total of 21 fouls were whistled. The referee was rather precise in his foul detection, making a good selection between physical play and infringement of the LotG.

On minute 16' he correctly awarded a goal kick to USA after a player from Ecuador falling down and maybe hoping for a penalty.

As mentioned before in the last 10 or so minutes the game became a bit more nervous. This was predictable, given the score and the importance of the game. Bastien decided to whistle more frequently than earlier on, in order to keep the game under control and avoid frustration fouls or violent reactions from the teams. The only time in the latter stages he did not follow this approach, as a matter of fact, led to complaints. This was at 90+2', when USA #10 was fouled from behind but the referee assessed the contact as fair. At the first interruption, as USA #2 was still complaining, Bastien had to warn him firmly – given the minute of the game a YC would have been probably the most sensible option here.

Lastly, a short mention to a collision at 64': USA #8 clashed with ECU #2, from the replays it is rather clear that the South American was blocked intentionally. Bastien was alert and spotted the foul, interrupting the attacking action of USA and awarding a free kick to Ecuador.

b3) Disciplinary control

Bastien cautioned two players, USA #6 (45+3') for holding and USA #11 (77') for a reckless tackle. Both decisions were unquestionable. Replay also showed that a YC to USA #10 on 82' would have been a smart decision.

The most interesting episode under this section is surely the challenge between ECU #4 and USA #18 at 54': the former kicked the ball away as the latter was in contention, but he touched with his foot the US player on his hip, right over the knee. The intensity of the contact was low, but ECU #4 was well aware of the presence of USA #18 and this kick could have injured his opponent. Bastien did not whistle here. According to the observer a direct free kick and YC to ECU #4 would have been the correct decision here.

b4) Physical condition

The referee showed very good fitness and optimal positioning. He was generally close enough to follow the play without interfering. He sprinted reasonably well throughout the game and did not look tired in the second half of the game.

b5) Cooperation and VAR management:

There was only one visible VAR intervention, which led to the confirmation of the second goal by Ecuador (43'). The whole process took 2 full minutes, as it was very tight. The review ultimately showed that the Ecuadorian scorer, #4, was slightly behind the ball as he got it from his teammate.

b6) Final assessment:

Bastien delivered a very good performance. Fair play during the game is partly due to his suitable tactical approach and prevention. He was able to adapt according to the increasing tension in the latter stages, keeping the situation under full control. Despite a few isolated mistakes in foul detection and card management, he demonstrated maturity in handling important games.

Positive points: foul detection; prevention; communication; physical condition

Points for improvement: alertness on reckless challenges, even though the ball is played

Assistant Referee 1 performance:

Hicham Zakrani did not signal any offside position. His no-offside decision at 43' was confirmed by VAR. That was eventually the match deciding goal.

Assistant Referee 2 performance :

Frédéric Haquette signalled 2 offside positions (38', 85'), one to each team. Both were correct, based on the available replays.

Fourth Official performance:

Abdelkhader Zitouni executed his duties on an expected level. He correctly awarded 5' of extra time in both halves, in the first one for injuries and VAR reviews, in the second one for substitutions and injuries. He had to manage occasional dissent from the benches, for instance at 61' when Ecuador complained about a ball that had potentially crossed the line. There is no evidence – based on slow motion and replays – that the ball was entirely out, so the decision can be backed.