

Law 5 - The Referee

REFEREE OBSERVATION REPORT

Competition, match, final score: FIFA U20 World Cup 2019 Argentina – South Africa 5:2

Refereeing team:

Referee: Ivan Kružliak (SVK)

Assistant Referee 1: Tomáš Somoláni (SVK)

Assistant Referee 2: Branislav Hancko (SVK)

Fourth Official: Iván Arcides Barton Cisneros (SLV)

Video Assistant Referee: Pol van Boekel (NED)

Assistant Video Assistant Referee: Adonai Escobedo González (MEX)

Blog Observer: Gus Stark

Presentation of the match:

The match at Tychy was competition opener for both teams placed in group F. Argentina were the pre-match favorites and an early goal from a well-delivered corner set them up for a good result. South Africa equalized before half time from a set piece, but Argentina broke the game in the second half. The refereeing team did not have many situations to assess, but the ones they had were crucial and not all decisions were convincing. Those need more analysis and provide opportunities for improvement.

Referee performance (Personality, LotG application, disciplinary control, physical condition, cooperation, VAR management) :

Ivan Kružliak seemed intent to make a good impression: alert, constantly moving, adjusting his position, displaying good physical condition. His personality was amicable in situations where he did not need to exert authority. However, he was ready to show who is in control when needed. The game was played at a relatively high tempo with potential for flare-ups.

However, the referee's authority was never really challenged and control was maintained throughout.

Following the positives, the situations that were more challenging tested the refereeing team and the impression is mixed. There were questions regarding foul detection, cooperation with ARs and work of VAR. Situations (including positive ones) are listed and commented on below.

8:08 virtually the first intervention the referee had to make in the game for a tactical foul in the middle on the pitch. Positioned nearby the referee used a strong whistle and body language for a foul that could easily have been a YC later in the game as South Africa were starting a fast counter attack. Well-managed.

21:38 a potentially wrong out of bounds call was followed by a very soft foul at 21:55. AR2 was very close, but did not seem to think there was a foul as no flag signal is made or any change in body language. South Africa score from the resulting free kick. Questions to be raised about foul detection and cooperation within the team as the situation was in the immediate vicinity of AR2.

29:25 a well-managed potential flare up as South African player prevents the GK from releasing the ball. Strong whistle and gestures sufficed in this situation as the temperature of the game did not demand a YC for this infringement.

34:55 a correct YC to ARG player for a reckless challenge. However, a "faster" card combined with more expressive body language would probably have limited complaints from the Argentinian players.

47:50 a SA player is hurt following an aerial duel after an Argentina player landed on his heel. He stays on the ground in obvious pain with the referee continuing the game for a further 30 seconds before stopping it eventually. The position changed twice during this time. Perhaps a more sensible approach would have been more appropriate as the stadium was getting emotional.

The referee's willingness to be as close to play as possible was perhaps a little too expressed as he interfered with play on more than one occasion (f.e. 48:05; 53:04; 55:15; 70:00; 70:38). This indicates a need to improve game-reading skills as some of these interferences were avoidable with better anticipation.

57:43 the referee gave what seemed a good play-on signal following a penalty appeal by Argentina. The referee indicated that a VAR review is in progress at 58:30 and stood on the pitch for a minute and a half before VAR called the referee to do an on-field review (at 59:58). Ivan Kruzliak took more than a full minute reviewing the incident and the decision was taken to award a penalty. The situation was extremely difficult to assess. However, reviewing the incident from a comfortable home and not having to deal with pressure of refereeing a game for an hour, my opinion is that a penalty should NOT have been given. South Africa player marginally plays the ball first and then makes contact with an outstretched leg of Argentina player. It would not be fair to criticize the referee in this situation as his first call was probably the right one. Questions need to be asked why VAR did not call the referee to do an on-field review sooner as they had ample time to see that the situation is borderline and too tough to call. Poor VAR cooperation.

63:41 immediately after the game is restarted following the 5 minutes that passed from the initial penalty appeal to a completed penalty kick, SA player 13 rushes to challenge for a ball that is leaving the Argentina goal line. A defender is shielding the ball making sure it leaves the field of play as it last touch a SA player. Frustrated SA player 13 cynically kicks the Argentinian player in the abdomen with no intention to play the ball whatsoever. All this takes place about 3 meters in front of AR1. He signals a goal kick and only indicates that SA13 has to be sanctioned by pointing at him with his hand. The referee shows a YC, obviously on information from AR1. Argentina nearly restarted the game before Ivan Kruzliak whistled for an OFR. VAR intervened and correctly called the referee to do an OFR following which the YC was correctly changed to RC for violent conduct. It is puzzling how AR1 thought the kick was only a YC offence.

83:45 a very soft if not downright incorrect penalty given to South Africa (supported by VAR). Argentina defender plays the ball and tries to carry it from the penalty area. When a SA player challenges for the ball, the defender attempts to shield it and they make contact. All this happens on the corner of the penalty area with the ball leaving. Considering all factors, the penalty should not have been given.

90:24 Argentina player is fouled close to SA penalty area, but the attack continues and results in a corner. The referee did not give an advantage signal which raises the question if he correctly identified it as a foul.

To summarize, I think Ivan Kruzliak applied himself to make sure he has a good game. However, lack of luck having to make the borderline penalty call for Argentina, poor judgement from AR1, and a soft penalty call for SA mean the Slovakian team have not started the tournament the way they expected to.

Assistant Referee 1 performance (Please mention the minutes of important / crucial situations):

AR1 had little work during this match, but his help was needed at 63:43 (see comment above) and he did not deliver.

Assistant Referee 2 performance (Please mention the minutes of important / crucial situations):

AR2 indicated the only offside of the game and correctly played on for Argentina's 5th goal. Other than that, it would be interesting to know what information he gave the referee for the foul at 21:55 (comment above).

Fourth Official performance:

Performed his duties as expected.

VAR

A mixed evening for the VAR team with a poorly handled penalty review, but a good intervention with helping overturn an incorrect YC into a RC.

Confirmation of the penalty at 83:45 can be supported – especially from a game management point of view.