

# Law 5 - The Referee

## REFEREE OBSERVATION REPORT

Competition, match, final score: U20WC – M28 – Italy (0) v Japan (0)

Refereeing team:

Referee: Mustapha Ghorbal (ALG)  
Assistant Referee 1: Mahmoud Ahmed Kamel Ahmed (EGY)  
Assistant Referee 2: Mokrane Gourari (ALG)  
Fourth Official: Sandro Schärer (SUI)  
Video Assistant Referee: Pol van Boekel (NED)  
Assistant Video Assistant Referee: Khamis Al-Marri (QAT)

Blog Observer: Alex F

Presentation of the match:

Final group match for both teams in Group B. Italy (in blue) had already qualified to the knockout phase, and Japan (in white) needed a single point to guarantee advancement as one of the top-two teams. Both teams had come off of comfortable wins and Italy had changed almost their entire lineup from their prior matches.

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

Game started off with more pressure by Japan and Italy countered by fouling to break up the momentum. By the 9<sup>th</sup> minute, Italy had committed four fouls to Japan's one, the fourth being a penalty for a clear careless tackle by ITA#5 on JPN#11. Play was going well wide of the goal, but could be considered SPA, as such no caution was correct. On this set piece, Ghorbal began to show good proactive behaviour at set pieces (other examples 11', 40', 55', 89').

Overall, there were 32 fouls (14 Italy-18 Japan) with two cautions (53' JPN#17, 59' ITA#7). Both cautions were supportable, though the first, deemed a reckless jumping at challenge was similar to offences punished in the first half with nothing more than a free kick. The second caution was for stopping a promising attack and came close to giving up a second penalty kick for the Japanese.

Some other incidents of note included a non-handball call in the 32<sup>nd</sup> minute when Ghorbal determined that a potential handball against ITA#6 did not constitute an offence, and there was no VAR call down for this incident, as it was not a clear and obvious error. In the 43<sup>rd</sup>, he showed empathy for the injury by ITA#18 and allowed him a moment to ready himself to continue play.

There was minimal dissent during the match, but in the 63<sup>rd</sup>, ITA#3 gave some mild dissent and Ghorbal gave him a verbal warning. The optics of this were not the best as it appeared that he was speaking towards the player's back for the majority of it. Two more injuries occurred, the first in the 77<sup>th</sup> when the referee allowed JPN#9 back onto the field of play as the ball was moving into that area. He was fortunate that JPN#9 did not make any move to interfere with play at all, but it would have been better to delay an extra moment to ensure that the ball is nowhere near that area. In the 79<sup>th</sup> JPN#16 and ITA#20 had a head-to-head clash and both went down. Ghorbal quickly stopped play and was on scene immediately. As both players were ultimately not injured, he allowed them both onto the field of play almost immediately after play had started.

The most unusual situation was in the 90+2 when a Japanese player ran into Ghorbal, losing possession of the ball in the process. The referee was right in the path of play, and when contact was made, stopped play and gave a dropped ball to the Italian players who had recovered the ball. The optics were a bit unusual in this situation, but ultimately the Japanese players did not raise any complaints about the situation.

Overall, the game was a bit choppy at times, but both teams adapted to his level of allowable offences and there was minimal dissent throughout the game. Part of this may have been due to the context in which both teams were playing, but Ghorbal was willing to let the teams play the match.

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

AR1, Kamel Ahmed, had a fairly quiet game with two incidents of note. In the 9<sup>th</sup> minute, Japan played a ball back towards their GK which was a poor one, forcing the GK to make a goal line clearance. Kamel Ahmed raced down the line but did not have a credible position for the goal line decision (outside the penalty area, ~20m off of the goal line). The ball was moving with significant enough pace that it would have been near impossible to reach from his starting position. With that in mind, knowing that there were no offside decisions to make in this situation, he could have anticipated that a pass in that direction, especially with the way the Japanese defender turned and telegraphed the movement. The other incident was in the 63<sup>rd</sup> minute where AR1 signalled an offence by ITA#3 right in front of the Japan technical area. This was a good call, within his area of credibility, and gave the expected decision, limiting any possible dissent from the Japanese team officials.

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

AR2, Gourari, was by far the busier of the two ARs in the match with four accurate offside calls made (44', 72', 73', 77'). In the 42<sup>nd</sup> minute after a corner kick, AR2 was able to get himself into an appropriate position to call a good in/out play on the line. A few minutes later (45+2') he called a foul that occurred in front of him to support Ghorbal.

#### Fourth Official performance:

Executed his role on an expected level. There was one interesting incident in the 22<sup>nd</sup> minute, as JPN#11 was being stretchered off. JPN#20 was being substituted for the injured player and entered the field of play early. Schärer quickly called him back to do the substitution procedure properly and correctly.