

Law 5 - The Referee

REFEREE OBSERVATION REPORT

Competition, match, final score:

2019 FIFA U-20 World Cup

PORTUGAL - ARGENTINA

Score: 0-2 (half-time score: 0-1)

Refereeing team:

Referee: Ismail ELFATH (United States)

Assistant Referees: Kyle ATINS (United States), Corey PARKER (United States)

Fourth official: Pacifique NDABIHAWENIMANA (Burundi)

Video Assistant Referee: Alan KELLY (Republic of Ireland)

Assistant Video Assistant Referee: Adonai ESCOBEDO GONZALEZ (Mexico)

Blog Observer: Stake

Presentation of the match:

Second game for both teams in that group. Portugal and Argentina have both won their first game against South Korea and South Africa respectively and the winner of this game would be automatically qualified for the knockout stages. The game was held under what appeared to be pleasant conditions in Bielsko-Biala with a crowd of 11,874 people. It was not only for both teams the second game in that tournament, but also for the referee Ismail Elfath, who led a US-American trio during that game.

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

Ismail Elfath's approach was to mainly stay in the background and only to intervene when it was necessary. This approach has shown that he has been very alert, which one could see at some moments of the match (correcting the ball position after whistling a free-kick, or reminding that players from the attacking team **can no longer enter the wall, as per the new Laws of the Game, in 18'**). He ensured also a **great level on prevention during set pieces (corners and free kicks)**, advising the players every single time that he was keeping his eyes on them: in one case (73'), he actually proved himself being quite consequent in that, by **issuing a YC to ARG14 and POR4 who were still grabbing each other after Elfath's warning**. Well done by the referee, the message to the players became pretty clear with these cautions. However, despite the high level of prevention, I had the feeling that the referee still was quite passive and distant towards players, which one could

see in his body language which doesn't appear that convincing: gestures should be made a bit stronger, also in terms of selling the decision better. This was a minor problem, given the fact that the game stayed calm and that the decisions by the referee were easily accepted, but this should be improved for hotter games.

Let's now speak about his disciplinary control and his application of the Laws Of the Game. The very first foul of the match occurred after 14 seconds, a tackle by ARG2 which one already could have perceived as a reckless foul. The referee however decided not to issue a YC, but to stay with a verbal warning, something which was understandable due to the (very) early stage of the game. Furthermore, I felt that the referee was not consistent enough when it came to potential **SPA offences**: there were several situations in the match where one could have expected a YC for **stopping a promising attack** (as in 18', 58', 74' and 75') but he chose not to do so. However, he chose to open the cards at **30' for an SPA offence by ARG2, which was correct**. However, here the **card-showing procedure should be improved!**

In that same category though, we must mention an incident which appeared quite awkward as a spectator. In 55', Ismail Elfath whistled and appeared to punish a simulation by ARG20 and was even ready to get the YC out of his pocket (his right hand went to his pocket), but then he decides to not do it and to continue play with a **dropped ball**. We can only guess what had happened there (potential VAR check perhaps?) and my feeling was that Elfath thought about taking the wrong decision, which would explain the restart of the game with a dropped ball. Very awkward situation, **this should be avoided in further matches!**

There were two incidents as well that we have to take a look at, both involving VAR. In **53', Argentina wanted a penalty for holding** and Elfath waved play-on and I think **that this was the right decision**: indeed, POR3 slightly pulls the arm of ARG20 but ARG20 exaggerates a lot while falling to the ground. This is a proof that such a contact cannot be enough to get a penalty. VAR checked the incident and **was right to support the initial decision made by Ismail Elfath**.

The other moment to be mentioned was the **crucial VAR moment for Argentina's decisive second goal in 84', which was checked for a potential offside position**. After a very long review (over 3 minutes), VAR confirmed the goal: a supportable choice, because even with the cameras that VAR had access to, it was impossible to determine whether ARG2 - standing in an offside position - touched the ball and therefore actively took part in the situation. In such cases, the VAR should always support the initial decision such as in this case. Good cooperation overall between **VAR Alan Kelly and Ismail Elfath, who are also used to work together in the MLS**.

To conclude this assessment, I think that Ismail Elfath had an okay performance in an easy game. He should work on his body language in order to appear more confident and convincing in his decision making. Ismail Elfath should receive another match in the knockout stage of this tournament (possibly during the Round of 16 stages), but I think it's difficult to see him in the later stages of the tournament. Nevertheless, all the best for the future!

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

Only one offside position that Kyle Atkins had to signal, which was correct. Performance on an expected level.

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

An expected level performance for Corey Parker. He correctly disallowed Argentina's third goal in **90+2'** after recognizing an offside position in the build-up. As required by the VAR protocol, he kept his flag down until the goal has been scored (which allows VAR to check the incident).

Fourth Official performance:

Pacifique Ndabihawenimana had only one incident, where **he was having an argument with the Portuguese coach, right after Argentina's opening goal in 34'**. However, it seems as things have been cleared quite quickly by the fourth official. He executed his duties on an expected level.