

Law 5 - The Referee

REFEREE OBSERVATION REPORT

2019 FIFA Under-20 Championship – Italy vs Poland **1:0 (1:0)**

Refereeing team:

Referee: Jesús Gil Manzano (ESP)

Assistant Referee 1: Ángel Nevado Rodríguez (ESP)

Assistant Referee 2: Diego Barbero Sevilla (ESP)

Fourth Official: Benoît Bastien (FRA)

Video Assistant Referee: Juan Martínez Munuera (ESP)

Assistant Video Assistant Referee: Gery Anthony Vargas Carreño (BOL)

Blog Observer: Osborne

A) Presentation of the match:

Round of 16 Italy-Poland was played at 5.30 pm in a rather crowded Gdynia Stadium (10,200 people), under a sunny and windy sky with 17°C .

The game was enjoyable with several scoring opportunities from both sides. Italy managed to take the lead after a penalty kick awarded on 37'. Poland had opportunities to level but did not manage that, although pressing went on until the end. Commentators reported a few complaints from the Polish players after the final whistle.

Spanish Elite referee Jesus Gil Manzano faced a rather correct game with a low level of dissent and fouling. He had to assess one crucial situation, resulting in a penalty kick awarded to Italy.

B) Referee performance

b1) Personality

Gil Manzano made a positive impression on players. Since the presentation and coin toss he looked relaxed and friendly to both sides. He did not overlook the small tensions that emerged at times, making a sensible use of verbal warnings, non only in the early stages but throughout the entire game (29', 60', 66').

On 68' ITA #11 was correctly invited to exit the field to the closest point, which was behind the goal line, rather than in the middle of the field.

b2) LotG application

In general, foul detection was good. The referee's stepped approach (fouls, verbal warnings, YCs) was pretty clear, with a few exceptions regarding disciplinary control, as we will see later. Gil Manzano also made great use of the advantage rule, notably at 44'. A potential free kick to Poland was missed on 54'.

The most important and only crucial decision that he had to assess was, however, a controversial one. On minute 37, POL #9 touched the ball with his arm in the penalty area, after a minor deflection from ITA #7. Gil Manzano waited almost 3 seconds and then whistled the penalty. It is almost certain that the delay in the whistle was due to a possible advantage to be played, rather than a chat with AR2, who was in a worse position to assess the incident.

In order to assess the situation, three elements from the IFAB updated LoG have to be considered:

1. the ball "came directly from the head [...] of another player" (ITA #7) who was rather close. The deflection was minor but did catch the defender under surprise, as suggested by the sudden movement of the arm to the back in the fractions of time before the contact.
2. the hand was close to the body, not making it "unnaturally bigger" (not increasing the body surface significantly).
3. the arm was vertical, pointing down to the ground, therefore far from being "above/beyond shoulder level".

All three elements should suggest that the situation did not meet any criteria for handball (**crucial mistake**). Furthermore, there was a clear movement of POL #9's arm away from the ball, trying to avoid the contact. VAR had a quick check and confirmed the decision by the referee. This will be analysed in the VAR section.

b3) Disciplinary control

The referee's disciplinary control was overall good with a few exceptions. YCs on 70' (ITA #20), 74' (ITA #3), 90+1' (ITA #19) were correct and important to prevent higher dissent. The opening card to POL #18 at 52' looked harsh, since there was not a clear point for SPA. The referee should have rather cautioned ITA #9 at 66' for what looked to be a late tackle – furthermore the player had already been warned after the 1st half whistle, so a card would have been more consistent.

b4) Physical condition

The referee showed excellent fitness. His sprinting was impressive from the beginning (a few examples on 4', 7', 17') until the last minutes (81', 82'). This allowed him to close the action very closely. One interfering with the game has to be mentioned on 35', causing a slight deflection. This was due to an odd positioning, too close to the side of the field. Despite this, surely physical condition is a big strength of the Spaniard.

b5) Cooperation and VAR management:

No other situations except from the penalty required the restart of the game to be delayed. Therefore, the discussion goes straight to the question: should Martinez Munuera have recommended an OFR?

Since the referee had a clear view of the incident, the situation should be a case for “clear error” and certainly not “missed incident/offence”. Was it a clear error? According to the observer, since the ball actually hit the arm of the Polish player and the arm itself was not fully tight to the body, the decision of VAR not to recommend an OFR is supportable, also having in mind common practices applied in this first years of VAR on a national and international level. An OFR would have been mandatory, on the contrary, if the ball had actually touched any legal part of the body. However, if we think about it in terms of “match-changing situations”, this certainly is one. This situation should encourage the debate around a better definition of what a “clear mistake” and “clearly wrong decision” is.

b6) Final assessment:

Jesus Gil Manzano convinced on the level of personality and physical skills, showing a remarkable level of motivation and involvement in the game, other than attention to details and excellent fitness. He demonstrated that prevention and game management do not necessarily mean leniency as a side effect. However, his performance was affected by a mistake that had a significant impact on the outcome of the game.

Positive points: fitness; prevention and communication; overall motivation

Points for improvement: handball assessment

Assistant Referee 1 performance:

Ángel Nevado Rodríguez did not signal any offside and did not have any significant decision to assess.

Assistant Referee 2 performance :

Diego Barbero Sevilla also did not signal any offside. However, on 23' he warned the referee that the ball had fully crossed the line and therefore the game should be stopped. It is unlikely that he participated to the decision to award the penalty to Italy.

Fourth Official performance:

Benoît Bastien executed his duties on an expected level. He correctly awarded 1' of extra time in 1st half (penalty), as well as 3' in the 2nd half (5 substitutions).