

Law 5 - The Referee

REFEREE OBSERVATION REPORT

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

Refereeing team:

Referee: Adham Makhadmeh (JOR)

Assistant Referee 1: Ahmad Al-Roalle (JOR)

Assistant Referee 2: Mohammad Al-Kalaf (JOR)

Fourth Official: Sandro Schärer (SUI)

Video Assistant Referee: Paweł Raczkowski (POL)

Assistant Video Assistant Referee: Jesús Noel Valenzuela Sáez (VEN)

Blog Observer: Osborne

A) Presentation of the match:

Groupstage Matchday 2 Ecuador–Italy was played at 6pm in Bydgoszcz Stadium, under a cloudy sky with 19°C. The pitch was in good condition, and attendance reached about 6,700 individuals.

32-year-old Adham Makhadmeh had to face a pretty tense game, with a higher level of dissent than average at this 2019 Under-20 WC, and several fouls from both teams – 38 total, 14 of which committed by Ecuador and 24 by Italy. Furthermore, he had to assess four crucial situation, two of which were assessed correctly, according to the observer.

Despite a very strong start from Ecuador, Italy scored first (15'). Then the South American team kept attacking, but facing a sending off at 40' and a missed penalty at 45+3' could not equalise, in spite of a relevant ball possession of 62%. The situation did not change in 2nd half.

B) Referee performance

b1) Personality

Makhadmeh is a cold-blooded referee, who prefers a strict application of the LotG and authoritative distance, rather than game management and empathic proximity. From very early in the game, he understood that dissent and reactions would have been a potential issue. He started with two great verbal warnings, the first to ECU #2 and ITA #11 on 2' just before a corner kick, the second on 7' to the captains ECU #4 and ITA #9, who started to confront each other. From that moment until the end of 1st half his decisions were fully accepted. Later on in the 2nd half his authority seemed to decrease, maybe due to the multiple VAR interventions right before half time. However, the only blatant dissent was correctly cautioned at 65' to ECU #3.

b2) LotG application

The referee decided to apply a very strict approach, whistling almost every contact. He only let the game flow when the ball was clearly played - as a matter of fact, he only whistled one advantage at 57'. The approach worked in terms of limiting the opportunity for violent reactions from the players, but contributed to a less enjoyable game, with a number of interruptions. The referee, though, was consistent with his line throughout the game.

On minute 20' he was very alert to whistle a foul on ITA #11, despite the player did not fall and kept playing. On the other hand, he missed two holdings in the penalty box, both on ECU #8 (44' from ITA #15 and 75' from ITA #11). The former was then correctly punished with VAR after an OFR, the latter was not considered. The referee probably did not see both holdings, and an OFR should have been recommended also in the second case (**crucial mistake**).

Lastly, at 77' a FK was whistled to ITA, but the foul seemed to be from ECU. The decision is hard to explain.

b3) Disciplinary control

Disciplinary control was overall good, with a few important exceptions. A total of 7 YC were issued, six of which correct (45+2', 58', 72', 65', 87', 90+1'), and one wrong, as it should have been a RC (84'). A potential first YC could have been issued to ITA #17 at 27', and a mandatory YC (or more) was missed to ITA # 1 goalkeeper for trying to hit the opponent after a saving (replay shown at 86').

On the other hand, the referee should be particularly praised for his booking for dissent on ECU #3 at 65' - the player clearly waved his hand to the referee in an unacceptable manner.

The two crucial decisions happened at 41' and 84'. In the first case, ECU #2 hit ITA #3 on the ankle in the attempt to play the ball. Assessing the incident as careless would not have been enough, as there was a clear use of excessive force, indicating a RC offence. The referee had a chat with the VAR room while the players were recovering and then correctly sent off ECU #2 without OFR. It is almost sure that the referee had detected the RC himself, as he already had his hand to the RC right after the whistle - his RC was in the left pocket, whereas the YC in the right one. In the second situation, ECU # 20 violently hit his opponent on the neck after a challenge. The referee proceeded to an OFR, but decided to only caution the player (**crucial mistake**).

b4) Physical condition

The referee showed acceptable fitness. The game itself did not require much sprinting, due to the many interruptions and the low number of vertical passes as a tactical approach from both teams. He did not interfere with the game at any time and was effective in anticipative movements.

b5) Cooperation and VAR management:

Cooperation between VAR and referee was not optimal and worked in only 2 out of 4 situation. In 1st half, the RC situation and penalty were well and quickly solved. In the 2nd half, as said, the referee should have issued another RC for violent conduct (84') and should have been recommended an OFR for holding (75'). Makhadmeh and Raczkowski were probably worried about the consequences of taking the same punishment twice against the same team.

b6) Final assessment:

Makhadmeh was unlucky to face a difficult game with several crucial situations to assess. He was good in 1st half, also thanks to VAR, but his performance was damaged – according to the observer – by two crucial mistakes in the 2nd half. A comparison that comes to mind with 2018 WC would be with Enrique Caceres in Iran-Portugal, where many VAR interventions due to missed situations led to a loss of confidence in the man in the middle.

Prevention should always be followed by action, when required, otherwise it seems just routine acting and the referee looks unconfident. That was what happened in the last 30 minutes.

However, the Jordan match official showed he is talented in a number of occasions, first of all by correctly assessing ECU #2 RC on his own. He should be appointed again, maybe on a lower profile and easier game, in order to gain more experience for the future.

Positive points: verbal warnings and prevention; no tolerance on dissent.

Points for improvement: alertness on holdings and violent reactions, especially in the penalty box; have the courage to take brave decisions in order to be consistent with the refereeing line.

Assistant Referee 1 performance:

Ahmad Al-Roalle signalled 2 offside positions (25', 77'), all of which were correct, based on the replays.

Assistant Referee 2 performance :

Mohammad Al-Kalaf signalled 3 offside positions (51', 73', 77'), all of which were correct, based on the available replays. In 2nd half, he might have spotted the holding on ECU #8 at 75' that was not considered by VAR, as well as the reaction of ITA's goalkeeper that could have been cautioned.

Fourth Official performance:

Sandro Schärer executed his duties on an expected level. He correctly awarded 2' (+2' after OFR and penalty) of extra time in 1st half, as well as 4' in the 2nd half (5 substitutions + 1 OFR).