Law 5 - The Referee

REFEREE OBSERVATION REPORT

Competition, match, final score:

2019 FIFA U-20 World Cup
MALI - FRANCE
Score: 2-3 (half-time score: 1-1)

Refereeing team:

Referee: Hector SORTO (Honduras)
Assistant Referees: Walter RAMOS (Honduras), Helpys CUEVAS (Dominican Republic)
Fourth official: Fernando GUERRERO RAMIREZ (Mexico)
Video Assistant Referee: Alejandro HERNANDEZ HERNANDEZ (Spain)
Assistant Video Assistant Referee: Jesús VALENZUELA (Venezuela)

Blog Observer: Stake

Presentation of the match:

Third and last group stage match for both teams: France in any case were already through to the knockout stages and France

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

Hector Sorto's performance can be described as a **very unlucky one** throughout this entire game, which is mainly due to his **weak level of disciplinary control**. In 20' and 22', the referee had two perfect opportunities to open the cards (in 20' after what can be considered a pretty reckless foul by MLI8 and in 22' for a shirt holding by FRA2) : both challenges would have been worthy of a yellow card, which would have put a signal on the game and which could have prevented some more dangerous challenges which happened throughout the game. Hector Sorto however decided to (correctly) open the cards at 25' after a foul by MLI4, however this booking came too late in terms of disciplinary action by the referee. What also needs to be pointed out in terms of disciplinary control is that there were **three fouls which IMO should have been punished with a RC for serious foul play**, not a single one being given :

=> 23': studs-up tackle by MLI9 on FRA13. The contact takes place on the leg and comes in with a certain intensity. What is striking here is that the **referee had a good view of the incident, but does not show a card at all, and only sticks with a verbal warning.** NO CARD is in my view a serious mistake here. Since this challenge could have been a red card offence, we must also speak about VAR here, who did not intervene at all in that situation. Since we are in a situation in which a

red card should have been shown and since NO CARD is a significant mistake, I think that Alejandro Hernández Hernández **should have recommended an on-field review for a possible red card here**. A red card for this challenge would have been in my view the correct decision and probably would have prevented other rough challenges.

=> 31': FRA18 makes a foul on MLI8 and is punished with a yellow card by the referee. It is a studs-up tackle and the contact is made on the knee with quite some force, which would fully justify a red card in that situation. I think that the referee made his decision based on the intensity of the contact and assessing it as not intense enough for a red card. If the VAR believes that the interpretation of the referee is not clearly wrong, then **it is understandable that he does not intervene in this situation**. A red card though would have been much preferable in this situation.

=> 52': MLI9 jumps into his opponent with his knee being in front and hitting FRA3 in the face. The referee assesses the foul as a reckless one and goes with the yellow card. However here, **given the high intensity and the potential danger of seriously endangering the safety of the opponent, a red card is mandatory for me.** Given the criteria of full-speed intensity, Alejandro Hernández Hernández **should have recommended an on-field review for this situation**.

The other yellow cards given by the referee (67' and 90+2') were supportable, booking however FRA7 for delaying the restart of play in 90+5' after Mali's 2-3 goal seems harsh, especially considering the extreme passivity shown by the referee throughout the entire match.

Hector Sorto had as well decisions inside the penalty area to make, such as in 63' when he assigned a penalty to France for handball. The decision to give a penalty is correct as the arm MLI13 is far detached from his body (unnatural position) and there was enough reaction time for the player to take the arm away (expected ball). Sorto's decision to point to the penalty spot is a supportable decision, also no reason there for VAR to intervene. The other situation in the penalty area was in 70', when FRA wanted a penalty after a potential foul on FRA11: the most important decision was here that **NO PENALTY by the referee was correct,** but a YC for FRA11 for simulation would also have been possible.

Hector Sorto is a referee who physically is **VERY fit**, that is not a problem. However what was sometimes problematic was his positioning, sometimes he simply was too close to play and was close to interfere also with it (such as in minute 9'). He was simply too passive throughout the entire match, failing to put signals and to control players: one could see in three confrontations (70', 88' and 90+5') that his decisions were not accepted and that he was not firm enough. I even had sometimes the impression that he was nervous in those situations, where it is absolutely crucial for the referee to be the "cool spot" to calm things down.

To conclude: Hector Sorto's performance was **below expected level and should no longer be appointed in that tournament**. Some of the problems that he already had in his first match of this tournament (see the report from Qatar vs. Ukraine) remained in his second game. He must absolutely work on his personality and more consistency in his disciplinary actions: both things provoked a lack of prevention, leading to brutal fouls and much more (unnecessary) aggressiveness in duels. However, being **only 27 years old and being already a prospective referee for future international tournaments, he still has a lot of time to develop further and to improve: this performance (and even this tournament) shows that a potential World Cup participation in 2022**

comes far too early for the Honduran referee. Hopefully, he can improve and can get chances to attend international tournaments in the future.

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

Not much challenged. Performance on expected level.

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

One incident to be mentioned in terms of cooperation: in 41' he raises the flag for an offside, however it was a back pass. The referee however correctly waved him down. Otherwise, performance on expected level.

Fourth Official performance:

Nothing to report. Performance on expected level.