

Law 5 - The Referee

REFEREE OBSERVATION REPORT

2019 FIFA UNDER 20 WORLD CUP

Match 32 (Bielsko-Biala)
30 May 2019, 20:30 CET

Nigeria - Ukraine

Referee: Fernando Andrés Rapallini (ARG)
Assistant Referee 1: Diego Yamil Bonfá (ARG)
Assistant Referee 2: Gabriel Alfredo Chade (ARG)
Fourth Official: Pacifique Ndabihawenimana (BDI)
Video Assistant Referee: Julio Alberto González Bascuñán (CHI)
Assistant Video Assistant Referee: Gery Anthony Vargas Carreño (BOL)
Law 5 Blog Observer: Mikael W.

Presentation of the match:

Both Nigeria and Ukraine knew that in all probability that a draw would take them both through to the next round, and ultimately 1-1 was the final score in this final round group match; such facts hide the level of tension with which this game was played. Fernando Rapallini, forty-one-year-old Argentine, handled his second match of the championship- having impressed a lot in his first, the France – Saudi Arabia game. Again he presented sophisticated soft skills and a pleasant way of refereeing, but this time Rapallini failed deliver such a good impression, having lost the overview in the 2H.

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

Let's start by talking about the crucial decisions that Rapallini had to evaluate:

- * [45' UKR No.3 carelessly charges into NIG No.20 inside the penalty area, referee awards a penalty. UKR No.6 is actually about to block the referee's perception, but he moves just in time. Correct.](#)
- * [49' UKR No.4 blocks a shot with his arm. Although the distance is short, his arm is away from the body and the final replay show the arm move towards the ball. Despite initially evaluating the incident as not punishable, referee awards a penalty \(and a YC\) after an on-field review. Correct.](#)
- * [54' NIG No.19 stamps on his opponent's ankle whilst jumping over him. We cannot be sure, but my feeling is that this was a deliberate act \(player keeps the perception of where his opponent lies, never checking if he were okay, satisfied having been only cautioned, etc.\). Having taken no action on the pitch, being called to an on-field review, referee very quickly decided to show a YC. Rapallini gave the impression that he already assessed the contact as an accident, and the YC was almost for](#)

'negligence' – or rather the severity of the contact. He **must** take more time at the referee review area to assess the whole situation. **Crucial Mistake.**

* 67' UKR No.4 stops a promising attack with a foul and should be sent off for a second caution. **Crucial Mistake.**

We saw a relaxed, friendly but still largely concentrated approach by Fernando Rapallini in this match. This match was a really particular one, even sorting out early cards, as referee did here (4' for a reckless strike), did not change the way that players were playing, yet it was not generally an unfair match. Perhaps, this can explain why Rapallini was happy to stay in the background – still whilst being involved with players (many successful smaller talks when needed), talking with them etc. – and what helped in the end leave a partly unsatisfying impression. Referee allowed the players to control the rhythm of the match at all times, no problem, but he should have sensed moments in order to step in (eg. a warning for kicking the ball away at 34').

There were perhaps other scenes where it was possible to calm the match. He operated a roadblock on reckless strikes to the face (4' rather not a mandatory one, 36' clear), but was much more lenient regarding studs-on-boot tackles; 3' on the goalkeeper was rather an accident but a whistle and verbal warning would have been the ideal solution, 26' was just a missed YC. Another verbal warning for a careless but late tackle at 14' was possible, clear missed YC at 62' for a reckless elbow carted out, and aforementioned scene. This should give the impression of the referee who just could not catch the feel of this game- as I'll expand on below, **this is different** from the passive referee who is not interested in prevention.

After the second on-field review at 54', one could arouse the impression of a partly stressed referee. His foul detection was very predictable prior to that, and besides some still good no-fouls seen (63', 69'), I had the idea of a referee who lost the clarity of thought by the end, some later and not really convincing whistles (+93' eg.). He surely had the same impression as I did, the referee who was unable to take charge of the game, although by around 75' the match by itself managed to calm down as both nations realised that a point was likely enough.

One can summarise this bad performance as *a shame*. Unlike other referees in this championship, Rapallini is not a passive referee and succeeds in his frequent talks with players. This time, he just missed the signals that would have calmed down this match, and besides he got a bit stressed with the OFRs and could never regain hold of the match having allowed the players much freedoms. Most important take home message should be **take the required time** in the referee review area when evaluating crucial decisions, even if you are sure in your feeling, it should be confirmed by the pictures.

Fernando Rapallini is a talented referee who should be at the front of FIFA's vision for the next World Cup, but he missed the chance for sth bigger like a Final appointment at this Under-20 WC.

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

Diego Bonfá had a good performance, without any on/off-side situations to evaluate.

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

Gabriel Alfredo Chade had a good performance, without any on/off-side situations to evaluate.

Fourth Official performance:

Pacifique Ndabihawenimana executed his role on an expected level.