

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: Refereeing Restarts Near the Goal

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Refereeing Restarts Near the Goal

By Randy Vogt

When I watch a soccer game on TV, I "referee" it. Sometimes instant replay confirms that I was correct and sometimes it does not.

Just as everybody else, I like consistency in the refereeing. A foul is a foul is a foul. What's a foul at midfield should be a foul inside the penalty area and I become very frustrated when the game is not officiated this way.

Arguably the most graphic evidence that referees are sometimes letting the defense get away with murder occurs on restarts by the goal. We have all seen the holding and shirt-grabbing in pro games as corner kicks and free kicks are played into the penalty area. If the same amount of contact occurred at midfield, the ref would whistle a direct kick but somehow it is expected that these fouls will go unpunished near the goals. So much so that a large amount of contact by the goal has filtered down to some youth games.

In April 2007, I went on a tour of the English Premier League, watching several games, including Sheffield United vs. Newcastle United. Since Sheffield coach Neil Warnock is a referee-baiter, I rooted for Newcastle. Referee Mark Halsey and his ARs unfortunately did not have a good performance. They lacked teamwork and Halsey let the players, rather than him, control the match in a game that definitely needed control. The penalty area became a bit of a war zone as the players knew that the ref was not going to make any important decisions there. What would Warnock have said had he had as clear a view as the ref, or me sitting behind the Newcastle goal, of the two hands grabbing a Sheffield player's jersey, preventing him from jumping to head the ball just a few yards from goal off a corner kick?

In a boys U-16 game that I refereed a couple of years ago, a free kick was crossed into the penalty area at the start of the game. There was contact between two defenders and one attacker as the attacker tried to get into position to head the ball. The contact was not putting a body on the attacker to prevent a free header but rather, one defender pushed the attacker from behind as he tried to head the ball, so I whistled a penalty kick. A couple of defenders complained.

The assistant referee on that side, not far from the defending team's bench, said that none of the coaches complained and I told him that those coaches know me and know that I am simply going to enforce the Laws of the Game. Besides, as I told the AR, "If I had not called that foul, we would have had holding and pushing on every play near the goal."

Obviously, it was easier for me to whistle what for some was an unexpected penalty kick as there were not thousands of fans watching and many more viewing on TV. That's just one example but come to any of my games and the matches of some other refs and you will not see the clutching and grabbing by the goal that you might see in other games.

All we need are some PKs whistled around the world and defenders would get the memo that they can no longer get away with fouling on restarts. If refs follow that up by continuing to be consistent in their foul decisions throughout the field, scoring will increase as attackers will no longer be fouled without punishment by the goal.

(Randy Vogt has officiated over 9,000 games during the past three decades, from professional matches in front of thousands

to 6-year-olds being cheered on by very enthusiastic parents. In "[Preventive Officiating](#)," he shares his wisdom gleaned from thousands of games and hundreds of clinics to help referees not only survive but thrive on the soccer field. You can visit the book's website at www.preventiveofficiating.com.)

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