

Gil Weber's Pregame Instructions

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These pregame instructions were originally written in 1999, and then were updated in 2002, 2005, and 2007 after International Football Association Board decisions and advisories from FIFA and USSF. Here now is the latest revision to include new instructions from FIFA and USSF plus "tweaks" based on my experiences over the past few years.

As I stated in the original preamble, adapt these instructions to your own style and temperament. Don't try to repeat verbatim what you read here. Instead, think about the points I make, reflect on how I ask my assistant referees to deal with them, and then create your own pre-game spiel to meet the needs of your games and the experience levels of your assistant referees.

This is particularly important when you're working with very young or inexperienced ARs. In their entirety these pregame instructions will utterly overwhelm a young AR who's probably still trying to get comfortable switching the flag from hand to hand.

But assuming you're working with ARs who have some reasonable comfort level on the touchline, this should cover just about everything. And so with that introduction, here goes.

You'll help me most by focusing your attention inside the lines for the entire 90 minutes (or however long). Please don't turn around to see who chases the ball when it goes into touch behind you. Don't watch to see what happens to the ball when it goes behind the goal line. Our game is between the lines, so watch the players and the field at all times.

If you're the A/R on the bench side the only time you should look outside the touchline is when you need to deal with substitutions, or if you have issues with the conduct of those on the team benches. If you can manage these things quickly without becoming distracted, that's great. If not, call me over and I will deal with the problem.

If you're the A/R on the spectator side your only concern outside the touchline should be if those spectators crowd the line and make it hard for you to run or to see past midfield to the far corner flag. If you can deal with the crowd quickly in these cases, that's great. If they won't give you a clear view of the entire touchline don't get into a hassle repeatedly asking them to move back. Call me over and I will deal with it.

Of course both of you should be aware and let me know if spectators migrate behind the goals and create a distraction for the goalkeepers. Otherwise, forget what's outside the lines and, instead, focus on the players.

The players are smart, and if one of them is going to do anything nasty it will probably happen when he thinks we're not watching. If you turn to watch the ball behind you, that's when a player will look, see his chance, and elbow or punch or spit. Then an opponent is lying face down on the field and I look at you with a facial expression asking, "*What happened?*" If you then look back at me with eyes like a deer caught in headlights, we're in trouble. We can't let that happen, we have to be aware, so watch the "hot" areas of the field at all times.

If I whistle for a free kick close to you and I have to come to the spot of the foul to deal with players or position the wall, do NOT watch me! **Nothing is happening where I am.** Instead, watch the players behind me, directly across from you in the penalty area. **That's where the problems could happen** because the players know my attention is away from them, and they will look and see that you're watching me. Then the nasty stuff starts, so watch the field!!

On dead balls the first thing we must do is make eye contact. If you have something to communicate then try to tell me what's on your mind with hand signals. For example, pointing to a player and then pointing to your eyes will be enough to tell me to watch him/her. Or patting your badge after I've whistled for a foul will tell me that in your opinion a caution is in order.

If it's a more serious matter that requires discussion, then motion me over. If I don't see you and it's really important that we deal with something **now**, then shout at me. Get my attention!

On each stoppage it's also important that you look across the field to the other AR. Make eye contact. If there is a flag up behind my back (e.g., for substitution) then mirror it.

If I fail to look over and make eye contact after several stoppages, don't worry. I'm not intentionally ignoring you. I've simply violated my first rule that says we must make regular eye contact. **But if I do ignore you don't let me continue! If I fall asleep on the job, wake me up!**

If I don't look at you several times then give me a shout and point to your own eyes -- I'll get the message to pay attention.

Offside is yours, but please remember that we have specific instructions on what must happen during play before we raise the flag. Please do not raise the flag for a player in an offside position who's doing nothing other than occupying space. If a player is in an offside position but is not participating, let

him be. He can set up a barbeque and roast hotdogs for 30 minutes if he wishes, but he's not offside until you decide he's become involved.

So I'll be depending on you to judge when that player has interfered with play or with an opponent, or has gained an advantage as a result of being in an offside position when the ball was touched or played by a teammate. Wait just a second and see what develops. Remember the new instruction in 2009 that interfering with play requires touching the ball.

Let's also be careful not to raise the flag too soon for a player in an offside position who has the ball played into his general area, only to have the teammate who last touched the ball run through the defense and collect his own pass. A second or two late and accurate is better than a fast but, ultimately, inaccurate flag.

Now, if you do raise the flag (and it's not a mistake which you immediately correct) then hold it up forever -- until I blow the whistle or wave it down ("*Thanks very much*"), or if there's a goal kick, or if I've gone completely asleep, until the defense takes the ball and there is no longer a threat of attack.

But if there is an attack in progress then never, never pull the flag down simply because I did not see it. Stand there forever if you have to -- like the Statue of Liberty. You're not the one who looks foolish -- I am. And that's my problem. The defense and their coaches will certainly let me know that your flag is up. (Boy, will they let me know!)

But we cannot allow a goal to be scored if you had the flag up and then brought it down because I did not see it and you decided you had to catch up to the attacking play. Similarly, if the ball goes into touch or over the goal line and then comes back into the field, raise the flag and stand there forever until I blow the whistle or until the attack breaks down and there is no longer a threat on goal.

I'm the one who looks foolish, not you. We cannot allow the ball to go off the field, come back in, and then go into the goal. If you've dropped the flag and I never saw it, and if I then award a goal we'll have big problems. So keep the flag up as long as there's a threat of attack!

OK, moving on...

If the ball goes into the goal and comes back out, and if I did not realize it and play continues, raise the flag to signal ball out of play and then stand there. You have to get my attention, so do not drop the flag. A goal is a goal, and my falling asleep does not negate that. As a last resort, shout to get my attention -- this is a game-altering incident and we have to get it right.

If I've turned away from you and headed up field and have not heard your shout, then the AR on the other side of the field should see your flag and should mirror it. (*"Hey, dummy. Look behind you!"*)

The most important thing is that we get it right. My ego is not more important than the game, so get my attention and tell me I'm wrong if I'm wrong.

Now, if the other AR does not see and mirror your flag, and if the game has had some stoppages and restarts then at that point it's too late to award the goal. All you can do is tell me at half time or full time and I'll have to deal with the consequences of my inattentiveness.

If the ball goes in the goal and in your opinion it's a good goal then follow standard USSF procedures. Do not immediately dash a long way up the line because if I decide it's not a goal then you have to run all the way back. So make eye contact first! (Remember... eye contact at stoppages!)

If I agree it's good then trot slowly up the line looking over your right shoulder at the goal line and penalty area to observe for post-goal nastiness, especially fights over the ball in the net. **Watch the players!!!**

If in your opinion it's not a good goal then stand there, at attention, per USSF instructions. Raise the flag **only** if the goal-scorer was offside. I'll look at you, you can motion me over and tell me "*Number 6 clearly impeded the keeper and prevented her from getting to the ball*" (or whatever it was). If I agree we'll cancel the goal and restart for the defense. If I disagree we'll go with the goal and I'll keep the defenders away from you. Don't be offended; it's not personal.

Now, if in your opinion it's not a good goal and I fail to make eye contact (instead, I point and run directly to the center circle), then raise the flag behind my back. Again, I hate flags behind my back, but I've violated my own rule about making eye contact. Standing at attention won't do any good at that point.

So you need to get my attention. The other AR must mirror the flag. (*"Hey, dummy, look behind you."*)

Next, we know that ARs are now expected to become more involved in managing the game, for example with fouls closer to them, or when the AR has a better line of sight than the referee. Please help, but please also watch me since I tend to use advantage more than most other referees. So early in the game, try to get a feel for my style.

Now, if you're convinced that I would have called the foul had I seen it then don't hesitate to raise the flag in the hand that indicates the direction of the

restart and then give it a wiggle. And now comes one of your most important duties – making me look good. :o)

Remember that if you're calling a foul I did not see I won't know what you saw. And that's the time the players are sure to ask "*What's the call, referee?*" I won't know, but I can't let them know that I don't know.

So please, every time you call a foul, give me a little hand signal – something very subtle (e.g., shirt pull, handling, push, etc.). **Remember, I may not have seen the foul, only your flag, and I have to sell the call to the players!** If you can help me avoid the deer-in-the-headlights stare when the players ask me, "*What was the call, referee?*" I'd be most appreciative. :o)

So those are your two most important duties as AR: First is offside, and second is keeping the referee out of trouble. And come to think of it maybe the order of those should be reversed. :o)

Let's talk for a moment about penalty kicks. Please be cautious flagging for any fouls in the penalty area that would result in a PK. Now understand that's **not** saying the penalty area is exclusively mine – it's not, and **we're a team**. But I am supposed to be able to see what's in front of me, and I'll take responsibility for that. I'll also protect you from irate defenders and coaches, so don't worry about them.

Just be certain before flagging for a PK. If you are convinced that I would have called it had I seen it, then make eye contact, raise the flag and give a wiggle, then hold the flag horizontally below the waist. After the whistle, go to the corner flag. (And don't forget the subtle hand signal to tell me what you saw so I can sell the PK to the defense.)

And if I whistle for a direct free kick offense that occurs just at the edge of the penalty area and I give you a look asking for help (inside or outside?), remember to use the new signal if it's inside – the flag held horizontally below the waist -- and if it's outside then just stand there at attention and I'll know.

Now there are two exceptions for fouls in the penalty area -- times when you should flag for a PK without any hesitation.

1) If a defender does his best Diego Maradona imitation by sticking his hand above his head or away from his body ("makes himself bigger") and unquestionably, intentionally handles the ball, and if I'm the only person on the planet who did not see it, then raise the flag and give the standard USSF signal for PK. Again, this is not something marginal. This is clearly, unquestionably handling – a game-changing incident -- and you're convinced I was screened or had a huge mental lapse.

2) If I've turned to run up the field and a defender clobbers an attacker behind my back in the penalty area then you must raise the flag. Now that flag will be behind my back (and flags behind the CR's back should be avoided whenever possible) but we're talking a game-destroying incident if it's not dealt with promptly. So raise the flag, and the other AR should be observant enough to see it and mirror. (*"Hey ref, look behind you. There's a problem significant enough for me to flag and point past you."*)

If I whistle for a PK then come around the corner and take your position off the field at the intersection of the goal line and penalty area line. Be a goal judge and watch for keeper movement forward from the goal line. If the goalkeeper moves early and that movement makes a difference then show the new signal (flag held horizontally below the waist). In my infinite wisdom (or lack thereof) I may choose to ignore that signal from you. Again, do not be offended; it is not personal.

I'll watch for encroachment into the penalty area by the field players. If the ball rebounds from the keeper or goal do not try to rejoin play to judge offside. You'll get caught in no-man's land and you're useless to me.

Instead, stay on the goal line and be a goal judge. I'll watch for offside. Move out to the touchline only when it's safe -- when the play has cleared the penalty area and the ball is going toward the other end of the field.

Now at PK incidents you also have one more opportunity to keep the referee out of trouble. If I whistle for a PK and you're absolutely convinced I was fooled by a dive then do not go to the corner flag. Instead, make eye contact, turn and walk a few steps up field, toward the halfway line. That's your subtle signal to me saying *"Hey, ref. You bought that dive? I don't think so!"*

When I look you can give me a little *"No!"* signal with your head, and a very subtle hand motion to show dive (but I emphasize **very** subtle).

Now of course these are unofficial signals, but remember that we have to get it right. The defenders will respect the officials a lot more if we get it right even after a short delay than if we force an unfair PK upon them. And if the attackers are honest with themselves they surely will know that their teammate took a dive.

And along those same lines of getting it right, remember that in 2009 we have new instructions on dealing with one-hundred percent misconduct (violent conduct) that has occurred out of the referee's sight, even if play has restarted. We can now go back and deal with the "crime" after a restart provided you have raised the flag and **kept it up through the restart**. When I finally do see the flag the perp can be sent-off based on your information.

The restart following this “delayed justice” will be based on whatever reason the ball was out of play when the game was subsequently stopped, not for the original misconduct.

So this is one of the times when you as the AR really need to be involved and insist. But remember that this “delayed justice” is not for everyday, simple misconduct. Rather, it’s reserved for the most egregious of misconduct – something that simply must be dealt with. And it can only happen if you maintain the flag until I stop the game. Failing that, the perp walks unpunished.

Moving on...

Manage the game as best you can when play is nearby. Handle encroachment on free kicks close to you and on corner kicks. Come into the field if you need to. But keep an eye on the attackers and read the game. They may want to take a quick free kick, and if you're standing next to the wall 10 yards inside the field when they put the ball into play then we all look bad when I have to blow the whistle and hold the restart while you retreat to the touchline. So use common sense here and try to stay at the touchline if you can.

Talk to the players when they're at the corner arc and you just know one player is going to kick the other player’s ankles. (*"Play the ball guys, not the ankles."*) If the player then kicks the ankles you nail him -- raise the flag. Talk to the players -- politely, respectfully, but we're in charge. They are not.

If they complain (*"Hey linesman, that was offside"*) don't be bothered. Players will complain and disagree. They're allowed to disagree and vent a little emotion. That's part of an emotional game. But they're not allowed to dissent and disrespect you. You must decide when disagreement turns into dissent. When you have had enough, call me over. But don't be overly sensitive.

Of course if they tell you to stick the flag where the sun doesn't shine (or something equally colorful) then call me over. Anytime you call me over it has to be for something that you could not manage yourself. So you must be prepared to tell me, *"White number 6 spit at blue number 12,"* or whatever. Do **not** call me over to say that green number 5 is complaining about offside. I don't care about that and you should not be over-reacting to that sort of stuff.

So listen and **hear what needs to be heard and ignore what can be ignored**. Stay calm and in control.

Work the same way with the coaches, substitutes, and spectators. They're allowed to disagree as long as they don't get out of line or become disruptive to the game, or interfere with your running on the line. So try to manage things as best you can -- politely but firmly. If you've tried but cannot deal with elements outside the touchlines, then call me over. **I will take out the trash!**

If you see something on or off the field involving players or substitutes or substituted players that in your opinion needs a caution or send-off then in addition to raising your flag to get my attention please give me a subtle, private signal. To recommend a caution put a hand over your badge. For a send-off you can touch your back pocket. If I see either of those signals I'll know you need to speak with me. Be prepared with jersey numbers and specifics.

All other mechanics are to standard USSF teachings (for corner kicks, throw-ins, goal kicks, substitutions, etc.). Just follow what you were taught and you'll be fine.

When checking-in the players be certain that the jersey number on the lineup is the same as the number on the shirt. And please look at the photos on the player passes! Does the person standing in front of you bear any resemblance to the photo? If not, hold the pass and show it to me. **Do not return it to the player or coach.**

One last thing I'd like you to remember. I'm not picky about the exact blade of grass for free kicks far from goal, for offside restarts, etc. If the player is close, let her play. Show the player where to take the throw-in, and if she gets quite close let it go. But if she ignores your direction and goes 5-10 yards away after you pointed to the proper spot, then raise the flag.

In the same vein, I don't care if the ball is placed a few inches outside the goal area for a goal kick when the nearest opponent is 40 yards away. Who cares? Certainly not the opponents. Please don't raise the flag and motion with your hand to tell me that the ball has to go back a few inches after it's been kicked into play!

Or if the keeper is punting the ball and reaches a few inches outside the penalty area just before kicking (clearly handling outside the area) don't raise the flag if the nearest opponent is many yards away. Who cares? It's utterly trifling, so let them play.

Be proactive and give a shout. "*Keeper, watch your lines when you're punting the ball.*" Then if the keeper persists we have the option to act after we've provided a reasonable warning.

On the other hand, if the keeper comes out to challenge and handles outside the area thereby preventing the opponent an opportunity to play the ball, then of course you flag it. That handling is unfair. **But let's not micro-manage trivial offenses that don't matter in the long run. Let inconsequential stuff go. Being technically correct when it's not necessary only causes preventable irritation for the players, coaches, and spectators.**

Now, any questions on things I covered, or are there things I did not cover that you'd like to discuss?

OK, let's pluck this turkey. :o)

Gil Weber is a National Referee Emeritus, State Assessor, and Referee Instructor. He is also a contributor to the USSF's *Advice to Referees* (all editions), *Laws of the Game Made Easy*, the *Guide for Fourth Officials*, the *Women's World Cup '99 Fouls and Misconduct* video, *You Make the Call*, and other Federation referee educational programs.