



To: National Referees  
National Instructors  
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State Referee Administrators  
State Directors of Instruction  
State Directors of Assessment

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Subject: **The Opinion of the Referee and Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunities**

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Attached is a clip from a match played September 16 between Chivas USA and Colorado Rapids (at Colorado). The clip presents a series of issues which, among other things, focuses our attention on the critical role of the referee's judgment in grey areas and on staying current as to interpretations of the Laws of the Game.

The simple facts are that Chivas player # 10 (Merlin) was attacking the Colorado goal and was fouled in the 11<sup>th</sup> minute by Colorado # 3 (Erpen). As a result, Erpen was given a red card and Chivas were given a penalty kick.

The first core issue is where the foul by Erpen happened. Fouls are complex events and require both time and space to occur. They cannot be easily pinpointed at a given spot on the field and a given second on the clock. Recognizing this, FIFA made it clear last year that a foul may begin outside the penalty area and conclude inside the penalty area – in which case, the referee should award a penalty kick.

That was clearly the case here. Initial contact with Merlin was outside the Colorado penalty area but the nature and consequences of that contact did not become evident for several more steps and seconds of play, by which time the event itself had continued into the penalty area. The penalty kick was a correct decision.

The second core issue is whether the offense met the requirements of an obvious goal scoring opportunity (the "4 Ds"). Here, the clip is less revealing. Each of the requirements involves judgment, some more than others, but three of the "Ds" would appear to be present based on the evidence – distance to goal, distance to the ball, and direction of play.

At the time of the foul (measured by when the referee decided the foul had occurred), Colorado player #29 (Sanneh) was definitely in the area of the offense. Based on the referee's distance and angle, Sanneh could have been judged either not between the foul and the opposing goal (making the Colorado goalkeeper Coundoul the only defender) or not able to add materially to Colorado's defense had Merlin not been fouled. Either decision would result in the 4<sup>th</sup> D (number of defenders) also being met.

*This latter element confirms once again that, even with an apparently objective and factual issue such as "number of defenders," there remain critical decisions which are and always will be based on "in the opinion of the referee."*

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