



## How to Become A More Effective Assistant Referee

By Alex Marquand-Willse

Whenever you watch soccer games on television, it seems like you only hear about the center referee, as if he's the only official on the field. We all know that's false. In fact, we would have a much harder time officiating a match if it wasn't for two incredibly important people: the Assistant Referees.

Just like with being a center referee, being an AR is as much a science as it is anything else. There are skills you can practice and develop that will make you better as an Assistant Referee, regardless of whatever skill level you may have at the moment. And as an AR, there is one skill you absolutely need to have if you are going to become truly good:

- **Keeping up with Players** - It's easy to keep up with the younger or the slower players, but it's those older and faster players that give everyone a hard time, especially as we are supposed to be judging whether they were onside or not at a specific moment. To add to the problems, they are never standing still when you need to judge whether they were offside or not. Players can be so inconvenient like that! So, then, why is it that some ARs can keep up with those faster players but others cannot? Why is it that some ARs are seemingly always in the right place and the right time to make the correct call? Is it that they are faster than everyone else? Maybe. Most likely, though, it's that they have practiced the skills that help them become good at this.
- **It's About the Time and Place** - First of all, getting the offside call right is all about timing. Timing, timing, timing. Nothing more. As you undoubtedly heard in your entry level course, at every touch of the ball by the attacking team, the AR takes a "snap shot" of the offside line. Remember, a player in an offside position does not mean he/she is offside, meaning you would not raise your flag. If a player is in an offside position at the moment the ball is played-and that moment only!!-and plays the ball, offside. So, you need to make sure, as an AR, you are in the right place at the right time to rightly judge if that player is in an offside position when the ball was played to her. Oh, and you need to be able to do this, most likely, without seeing when the attacker touches the ball to play it to a teammate in a potentially offside position. Make sense?

**]So, how do you do it?**

**The first tool: sidestepping, while your body is square /perpendicular to the field**

Squaring your body to the field and moving by side-shuffling right to left and left to right, your eyes will (or should!!) always be on the second-to-last defender.

Doing this makes sure you know what players could be offside and which could not be offside.

And remember, ***the flag is in your left hand or the hand closest to the referee!!*** That's two-thirds the battle.

From there on out, all you need to figure out is when the ball was played by the attacker's teammate. That, however, is the tricky part. That's a skill, though, that you can work on and improve by understanding and practicing.

For starters, you, the AR, are always at a disadvantage when it comes to judging offside because the players are looking at the ball because they can. You can't; you've got to look at the offside line. And, because they have the advantage of seeing the ball when the AR doesn't, sometimes they can get away with being offside because the AR doesn't "see" the ball when it is kicked.

The AR can level the playing field with these tricky attackers in two ways:

1. Taking quick looks to identify where the ball is and which player, attacker or defender, is most likely to play the ball; and
2. ***"Looking" with your ears, not your eyes.*** Using your ears allows you to hear when contact is made with the ball; the quick little looks you were taking earlier tells you who was playing the ball. That way, while hardly moving your head, you can tell when the ball was played and by whom it was played at the moment it was played, helping you accurately make the call: offside or onside.

Once that happens, once the AR has locked on the second-to-last defender and are in line, square to the field directly facing the line of defense, and ready to make the onside/offside call, the moment has arrived for you to begin adjusting for the sprint up field following play. What you do at this moment can be the difference between keeping up with play and falling behind.

And the best way to not get left behind is to pick up on physical cues from the players:

- Are they leaning forward as if they are preparing to sprint toward goal?
- Are the defenders dropping backwards as if preparing to run toward their own goal?

Picking up on these clues and using your ears to "see" when the ball is played will prevent you from falling behind as you can prepare to sprint before the players do.

In effect, picking up on this stuff can give you a head start on the players, can help you beat the players to the goal, can put you in the right spot at the right moment to make the right call. **Best of all, anyone can do this as long as you practice.**

**So, to recap..**

1. Side-step to stay even with the second-to-last defender
2. Take quick glances to see who is playing the ball
3. Use your ears to hear when the ball is played and "see" the same thing as the players
4. Pick up on physical clues from players to tell you when to prepare to sprint
5. Sprinting before the players helps you beat them to where you need to be

Now, go work on it. Perfect your ears ability to "see" and watch your ability as an AR skyrocket.