



Players and referees, taking charge

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LONDON The story of a short summer should never be about a referee. The exception might be the Frenchman Stéphane Lannoy.

In late June, Lannoy was sent home from the World Cup after angering both Brazil and the Ivory Coast in their first-round match. He was fooled by Luis Fabiano, allowing the Brazilian to use an arm twice while scoring a goal. Later, the referee sent off Ricardo Kaká after the Brazilian was barged into by Kader Keita, who then theatrically fell to the ground.

Lannoy seemed to be a very nice man, easily conned by artful dodgers. However, after a couple of months back at his regular job, this same referee has possibly set a standard that could free the professional game of systemic goal-mouth cheating.

Lannoy took charge Wednesday of the Champions League match between Werder Bremen and Sampdoria. He was up with the play and wise to all the tricks. Midway through the second half, having already yellow carded Sampdoria's Stefano Lucchini for a foul, he sent him off and gave a penalty after the defender grabbed the shirt of Sebastian Prödl and pulled him to the ground.

This proved the decisive moment in a contest that Bremen won, 3-1. More than that: If other referees and players learn from it, Lannoy's right and proper interpretation of the rules could free us all from the widespread and galling abuses inside the penalty boxes.

Bravo, Monsieur Lannoy. How many times do we see defenders wrap their arms around forwards, tug at their shirt or shorts and deny goal-scoring opportunities with wrestling techniques? And how seldom do referees apply the remedies clearly defined in the rule book? We will have better, cleaner matches if Lannoy's example is followed.

The Champions League qualifying matches, in some cases between teams

whose domestic leagues have not even started, are worth as much as \$30 million in revenues to the clubs. Bremen, for example, needed a good result just 24 hours after it had little option other than to sell its star player, Mesut Ozil, to Real Madrid.

The German club had sold its Brazilian playmaker, Diego, to Juventus last year to make room for Ozil's development. However, after a bright World Cup, Ozil attracted bids from the high-powered elite and his father, Mustapha Ozil, determined that his that the 21-year-old would join Madrid.

"Mesut and I stayed at the chalet of Florentino Pérez, the Madrid president," the senior Ozil told the Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet*. "He invited us, and we were able to agree things really fast because almost everything we spoke about was agreed to. I liked his willingness to help my child to play for his club, and I promised Florentino that if Bremen kept Mesut from leaving now, next year he will play for Real Madrid for free because his contract ends this season." Bremen did what Bremen had to do. It negotiated for an extra couple of million euros on the reported fee of €15 million, about \$19.2 million, and bid farewell to the player known to Werder fans as "magic."

The team needed a response from its players. It came in the goals from Clemens Fritz, Claudio Pizarro and the penalty from Torsten Frings. Sampdoria got a last-minute goal from Giampaolo Pazzini that gives it a glimmer of a chance in the second leg of the playoff, in Genoa on Tuesday.

There are 10 such playoffs involving clubs from 20 nations. In some cases, the opponents have quite arbitrary advantages because not all of the domestic seasons start and end at the same time.

On Tuesday, the Swiss club Young Boys capitalized on two advantages to race into a three-goal lead in the first half hour against the London club Tottenham Hotspur. Switzerland's league is into its seventh round, while Spurs had just played one league match.

And the field in Berne is artificial. Tottenham held four players out because of injuries that might have been exacerbated on the surface but recovered to

score twice. Down 3-2, Tottenham has a fighting chance of overcoming the odds next week to reach its first European top-level tournament in 50 years.

Hapoel Tel Aviv has the edge in an equally intriguing, similarly poised encounter with Salzburg. The Austrian side lost at this stage to another Israeli team, Maccabi Haifa, a year ago, and had prepared thoroughly to try to prevent a recurrence this time.

After just three minutes, however, Salzburg conceded a penalty, and Tel Aviv's Nigerian goalie, Vincent Enyeama, immaculately scored on the kick.

Nikola Pokrivac equalized, but by the 53rd minute the visiting side was up, 3-1.

Its goal scorers are fascinating young men. The first was Itay Shechter, whose form has interested the English club Birmingham City and Germany's Hamburg.

His goal was followed by one from Ben Sahar, who recently turned 21 and has already played for seven clubs in four countries. Chelsea began his travels by taking him at the age of 16 from Hapoel Tel Aviv to its training academy south of London. He flourished there for a time, had three first-team games, but after attempting, unsuccessfully, to be excused from military duty in Israel, he left England.

Chelsea was overstocked with talents and sold Sahar for £1 million to Espanyol. The Spanish team in turn loaned him to Tel Aviv this summer.

You sometimes wonder how these precocious starlets cope with a life on the road. Sahar has been a player of no fixed abode since his school days, adapting to new systems and languages and above all attempting to form relationships long enough to show his skills. He has scored goals at every level for Israel and he had already scored for Tel Aviv against Kazakhstan's Aktobe in the Champions League preliminary round at the start of August.

On Wednesday, he took a pass from Shechter to score again. Salzburg's Roman Wallner then made it 3-2 from a penalty, but the Israelis now have home advantage. If that counts for anything in Sahar's nomadic existence.