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Revolution in Football: Video Assistant Referee (VAR)



Highlights of this issue

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Football is a sports branch that has been played with the same rules for a very long time and might be described as a “conservative” one. However, football could not resist the technology and somehow, has been involved in the technological developments. Perhaps, the contribution of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) by following technological developments closely for a long time is the essential part for such involvement.

Especially, after a very controversial referee decision in the Germany-England match at the World Cup 2010, FIFA developed a system called “Goal-Line Technology” and after the success of such system, FIFA began to work on a system called Video Assistant Referee (VAR). The first test of the VAR system was made in the Italy-France friendly match on September 1st, 2016 after the great efforts of FIFA. Turkish Football Federation announced that the VAR system will be used in the major leagues such as Super Toto Super League at the 2018-2019 Season.

What is the VAR?

Video Assistant System is a system aiming to help the referee for the controversial positions by means of another referee who is watching all positions again and again on the screen. The VAR system has been developed for the purpose of helping to decide a number of “suspicious” positions in the course of the game such as goals and whether there was a violation during the attacking phase of play; penalty decisions; direct red card decisions; mistaken identity in awarding a red or yellow card.

It is important to note that, even if the purpose of the VAR system is to make discussions clear; the final decision must be taken by, the referee as the sole authority. The only purpose of the video system is to help the referee. TFF, who stated that this system will be used in the major leagues in this season, frequently emphasized subsidiary role of this system.



Video Assistant Referees monitors the match through special screens which they can see and review each position to determine if there is an obvious mistake. If the position requires an examination or a re-evaluation, the referee will

be contacted through VAR. Perhaps the most important point here is that the sole authority to initiate the relevant examination is the referee. Therefore, he may decide to initiate an examination as he may decide that the situation does not need to be examined. In the VAR system, VAR shall not take a decision on behalf of or instead of the referee or the referee cannot be directed for taking a specific decision.

VAR Used for the First Time in World Cup Final

VAR was used for the first time in a World Cup final at the 38th-minute for a penalty which Antoine Griezmann scored. The penalty was not immediately given but, referee Argentinian Nestor Pitana was alerted to a possible handball by VAR; and then he pointed to the spot for France.

The final is the highest-scoring World Cup final since 1966 and despite a late push by Croatia, the match finished as a 4–2 victory for France.

Additionally, it seems that VAR will re-shape football in the future and bring a new dimension to the sport as far as we know since the statistics are quite different comparing to other World Cups:

- In Russia 2018, 29 penalties were awarded in part due to VAR system. In Brazil 2014, we observed 13 spot kicks. In the 1990, 1998 and 2002 tournaments, 18 penalties were awarded.
- The number of the red cards (4) is the lowest number since 1968. In Brazil 2014, we observed 14 red cards.

Although the video system may be subject to criticism and the accuracy of the results cannot be guaranteed, most football fans support such practice due to the abovementioned reasons. In fact, it is difficult to get used to technology, technology already involved in our daily lives in many aspects and such involvement is increasing day to day. For this reason, the VAR system will probably be considered as one of the greatest innovations in the football after it has been developed as much as possible. In the future, this may be even the major impact for all sports to demonstrate the importance of technology. We can even say that this is already happening for football.



Answers. Not theories.

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