



PROFESSIONAL GAME
MATCH OFFICIALS



The Football Supporters' Association - PGMOL

25/05/2023

13:30-14:30

Attendees

PGMOL

Adam Gale-Watts, Technical Director (AGW)

Ben Campbell, Head of Communications (BC)

Supporter Representatives

Neil Dady, Wolves 1877 Trust (ND)

Steve Moulds, Foxes Trust (Leicester City) (SM)

The FSA

Andy Walsh, Head of National Game and Community Ownership (AW)

Harpreet Robertson, Premier League Network Manager (HR)

Thomas Concannon, Premier League Network Manager (TC)

Notes

On the 25th May 2023, representatives of The Football Supporters' Association (FSA) VAR Working Group met with representatives of Professional Game Match Officials Limited (PGMOL) to discuss varying matters relating to refereeing and VAR communication. Representatives of both organisations last met in October 2022 and committed to regular dialogue moving forward.

On the 18th May 2023, representatives of The FSA met with the Premier League for a structured dialogue meeting in which Howard Webb, Chief Refereeing Officer, and Ben Campbell attended to update supporters on the VAR audio that was released publicly in the UK for the first time, where supporters were shown audio and video footage of selected incidents where VAR intervened during the 2022/23 Premier League season.

In the meeting with the Premier League, TC updated PGMOL with results of the National Game Survey undertaken by The FSA, which showed supporters attending games had a very poor experience of VAR. The results of the survey will be released in full in the FSA's Annual Review at the AGM in June 2023. TC also updated PGMOL that communication to supporters inside stadiums during a VAR decision was inconsistent and agreed to collate information from Premier League clubs on this issue.

The working group updated PGMOL that there were major inconsistencies across the division as to how VAR decisions are communicated within stadiums, with some clubs showing no replays on the big screen, and some clubs only showing decisions that go in favour of the home club. There were also inconsistencies over stadium announcements and onscreen messaging. PGMOL advised supporters that clubs are provided with all the messaging and video footage required in order to inform supporters as much as possible about reviews that are taking place. It was agreed that both parties will continue to liaise with key stakeholders to improve supporter experience inside football stadiums.

Following the VAR audio release it was agreed that this was a good method of communication and education for supporters and that it should be used more regularly moving forward. It has received positive feedback from supporters across the country, and whilst some supporters believed the examples shown were too selective to favour the use of VAR, most accepted this was a positive step forward and looked forward to seeing more. The working group agreed that regular viewings of key match incidents would improve the respect towards referees. PGMOL agreed that the examples shown were selected to educate as a first move into the public domain of communication between match officials on and off the field in the Premier League, and that it was definitely possible more decisions could be shown in the future to further enhance the insights into decision-making process and considerations.

Currently, IFAB and FIFA regulations do not permit match official audio to be used live during a game. Howard Webb and the new communications team at the PGMOL are working on ways to get more education regarding key match incidents to clubs, supporters, broadcasters and the media.

Due to both incidents being fairly recent to this meeting taking place, supporters wanted further clarification and understanding on two decisions that took place during gameweek 37, Tyrone Mings' challenge on Cody Gakpo during Liverpool v Aston Villa, and Bruno Guimaraes' challenge on Boubakary Soumare during

Newcastle United v Leicester City.

PGMOL said good officiating always starts on field -this is the prime directive. The on-field referees' decision is final. If a possible red card is reviewed, there has to be evidence of a 'clear and obvious' error made by on-field officials.

Concerns were raised by the working group that supporters around the country sometimes struggle to understand the laws of the game in incidents relating to deliberate play and deflections and deliberate handball, given that both laws have changed in recent times, the working group believed educational tools to help supporters understand the laws of the game would be extremely useful.

PGMOL said that the International Football Association Board (IFAB), guardians of the football rules of association football, are including guidance regarding deliberate play in the changes to Law 11. In principle where the defender makes a controlled action to play the ball, this is a deliberate play and the attacker who was in an offside position should not be penalised. Over the PL season there were at least two contentious incidents this season involving Elliot Anderson for Newcastle United v Nottingham Forest and Cody Gakpo for Liverpool v Aston Villa. Changes will be announced before the new season commences.

The working group also raised the question of time-keeping following some games seeing increased added time during gameweek 37 and whether this would be a regular thing moving forward, following the methods used during the World Cup in Qatar. PGMOL said we should expect to see some further detail around allowance for time lost from next season in line with the expectations of The IFAB.

When asked regarding offsides and whether semi-automated offsides would be introduced, PGMOL stated any implementation of the technology is yet to be confirmed – this would be a decision for the competitions (as with VAR) to decide to implement.

PGMOL were keen to stress that over the course of a season, hundreds of thousands of decisions are made, whereas the level of decisions that have been clearly marked as mistakes is very low in comparison. The working group agreed that releasing figures relating to refereeing decisions is useful and PGMOL released the figures relating to on-field decisions from gameweeks 1-17 (pre-World Cup) to 18-30 (post-World Cup)

PGMOL extended an invite to supporter representatives to attend Stockley Park to experience the VAR Hub and committed to continuing regular dialogue with The Football Supporters' Association three times a season.