



By George Stavroulakis

When will refs and commentators learn the rules?

I've written before about how ridiculous it is that professional commentators and (even worse) referees don't know the rules.

The situation has actually been made far worse by the VAR because you can understand a referee getting something wrong in normal time, but when the referee (with the aid of a 4th official upstairs AND a video replay STILL gets it wrong, you just have to wonder what the hell is going on in Australian football.

Last night, the Jets conceded a penalty for handball against the Wanderers. So, before I go on, let's just have a quick peek at the actual laws of the game...

Handling the ball

Handling the ball involves a deliberate act of a player making contact with the ball with his hand or arm. The referee must take the following into consideration:

- the movement of the hand towards the ball (not the ball towards the hand)
 - the distance between the opponent and the ball (unexpected ball)
 - the position of the hand does not necessarily mean that there is an infringement
 - touching the ball with an object held in the hand (clothing, shinguard, etc.) counts as an infringement
 - hitting the ball with a thrown object (boot, shinguard, etc.) counts as an infringement
- Note in particular that there is no mention of:

- gaining an advantage
- arm in an unnatural position

If the hand hitting the ball was not deliberate then the correct decision is play on - even if the ball goes directly from the hand into the goal (I'm looking at you Chris Payne).

And yet, despite this very simple rule we constantly get players, coaches, commentators and even referees with the benefit of VAR getting this wrong.

The penalty last night against Nikolai Topor-Stanley was an appallingly bad decision. Topor-Stanley's arm was already in the air when the ball rebounded and hit him. He wouldn't have even seen the ball until it had already hit him and there was no movement of the arm towards the ball.

"Oh, but his arm was in the

air!" some will say. Doesn't matter. Footballers aren't river dancers. His arm had every right to be in the air when he was jumping and he couldn't possibly have moved it out of the way when the ball unexpectedly rebounded.

And before you try and howl me down, please refer back to the actual laws of the game... although why fans should do that when referees and commentators couldn't be

arsed is a fair enough question. As I've said before, commentators not knowing the rule is, frankly, scandalous. Robbie Slater had several looks at the replay and said several times it was "clearly a penalty". But it wasn't Robbie. It was most definitely NOT a penalty. Then John Kosmina made it worse by saying he was old school and that it didn't matter whether hand ball was deliberate or not.

I'm afraid it does matter John, it's the ONLY thing that matters, and when you think about it, there ought to be very few handball decisions because almost no-one ever really intends to handle the ball. When they do it tends to be pretty obvious - like Thierry Henry's nasty little effort against Ireland.

I would also suggest that the third goal ruled out for a foul by Jason Hoffmann on Vedran Janjetovic was also wrong. It looked to me as though Hoffmann was obviously going for the ball, as he is entitled to do. Football is a contact sport so Hoffmann was allowed to make fair contact with the keeper, and the keeper's responsibility was to hold the ball.

The goal was given, but then overruled by the VAR - who are only supposed to intervene in the most egregious of circumstances. I say the goal obviously should have stood so how does the VAR rule it out?

Again, Robbie Slater went on about the decision being correct because Hoffmann had made contact with the keeper. He's allowed to!

Seriously, I really do wonder about the qualifications of people who commentate on football. I don't mean to single Robbie out (who I usually quite like) - there are plenty of others who frequently get it wrong.

They're obviously not reading my articles.

Legacy Schmegacy - Another Cahill clanger

Super, Super Tim... Super, Super Tim... Super, Super Tim, Super Timmy Cahill! These words would have been sung tens of thousands of times in Germany and in the years shortly after. I haven't heard them for a while...

Which is tragic when you consider he is one of our greatest players (up there with Harry Kewell, Mark Viduka and Mark Schwarzer) and arguably our most effective ever player. He's still the only Australian striker all but guaranteed to get us a

goal if we need one.

But Timmy, great as you are, that does not give you right to crap on the A-League by telling the English media you were just going through the motions. And for someone who uses the word respect so frequently it's a tad ironic, because if you were not giving 100 per cent it means you didn't respect the league, the club and the coach.

Either he doesn't understand the word or thinks it applies only to him.

Some people might still



fly to his rescue and say: "He's right. The A-League isn't as good as the Championship."

But so what? The A-League was paying his wages and part of the

deal was surely that he bring to the league some of the passion and professionalism that made him what he was in England - the home of football.

Australian football fans: We won't be taken for granted any more

Representatives of A-League active fans groups and Footballers Supporters Australia (FSA) are hopeful meetings with FIFA, AFC and FFA will result in supporters having a voice in the running the game.

The discussions involving five A-League clubs and FSA were viewed as an historic moment as the biggest stakeholder in the game - the fans - were able to voice their issues to FIFA about a lack of fan engagement by the governing body.

Grant Muir, the representative of Sydney FC's the COVE, felt the meeting with FIFA and the AFC was the first time Australian football supporters were acknowledged as a serious stakeholder.

"We got our point across to FIFA that the FFA has never considered fans to be an important priority," he said.

"They have never put in place any structure to normalise fan relations. They have never provided any resources to

advise clubs on how to engage with fans effectively."

In the room along with officials from FIFA and the AFC was also FFA CEO, David Gallop, and Head of A-League, Greg O'Rourke.

Muir said he took the opportunity to outline to FIFA how the sporting landscape in Australia was different to other countries and how that affects football fans.

"One of the big points we made to the FIFA delegation was that we live in a country with a press that is persistently hostile to football's interests as well as a hostile police," he said.

"That creates a situation where the governing body has to act differently to other countries and has an obligation to organise and act to protect the fans."

Muir said FIFA were taken by surprise by what Australian football fans were asking for, compared to the dealings they had with Football Associations from other countries.

"My immediate reaction was Australia isn't other countries," he said.

"In the US for example, football isn't the main sport but they don't have a hostile press.

"You only have to look at how active supporters are viewed there and what they are allowed to do and how quickly that support has evolved, when you don't have hostile political pressure pushed against them.

"When there are news stories on Channel Seven that show police training for riots and hooligans for football fans at Campbelltown Stadium

the FFA should step up.

"They should say here are the facts that prove that A-League games are safer than any other sport proportionally to the size of the crowd."

Meanwhile, Pablo Batteson from the Footballers Supporters Australia hoped the talks would result in effective change.

"My call to the leadership of FFA is that if you are really serious and you want to get the best out of fan engagement you've got to see us on an equal basis," he told FourFourTwo.

"We don't want to be taken for granted anymore. There has got to be a paradigm shift fundamentally.

"We have hope and we have some optimism.

"We put it to FFA and FIFA to come up with a much better way of doing things in terms of more inclusive governance for the administration of our football, so we can fulfil the great potential that we know we have."