

# BACKGROUND GUIDE 1

## Union of European Football Associations

### Discussion on the standardization of interpretation and use of VAR in Game-Defining moments

#### LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Greetings Delegates!

It is indeed an honour to welcome you to this simulation of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) at SHISMUN 2024. We sincerely hope that being a part of the conference is an intellectually stimulating experience for you as well as for us. For all procedural purposes of this meeting, we shall adhere to the **UNA-USA Rules of Procedures**. The purpose of this background guide is to equip you with the required knowledge about the committee as well as the agenda, therefore make sure you read and understand this background guide judiciously. However, **at no point assume that only the content of the background guide can substitute for further research**. Please also note that **nothing written in the background guide can be quoted or used as proof for any claims/allegations in the committee**.

Additionally, for this committee – and MUNs in general, **we do not wish to know your research or the statistics you may read; we are particularly interested in the meaning of the statistics and numbers you may have read, and its analysis**. Keeping that in mind, we cannot emphasize the need for analysis and evaluation in your arguments and speeches any further. We also implore you to go through the **“Questions to Consider”** as these are some questions which we as the Executive Board would want the delegates to go through and implore to find answers to in the committee proceedings.

Please feel free to contact us via e-mail in case you have any questions or queries, or if you wish to seek any clarifications. We shall be happy to assist. All the best!

Regards,

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## **ABOUT THE COMMITTEE**

The Union of European Football Associations – is the governing body of European football. It is an association of associations, a representative democracy, and is the umbrella organization for 55 national football associations across Europe.

UEFA is a society entered in the register of companies under the Swiss civil code with its headquarters located in Nyon, Switzerland. It is a continental confederation recognized by the world football governing body FIFA. The sitting president of UEFA is Aleksander Čeferin, Followed by Vice-President Karl-Erik Nilsson and Treasurer David Gill. UEFA's Policy is shaped by 19 different committees, you can read more about them here.

UEFA conducts a total of 3 Tournaments for Men football clubs, which consist of the UEFA Champions League, UEFA Europa League, and UEFA Conference League.

## **What is VAR?**



VAR (Video Assistant Referee) is a technology used in football (soccer) matches to assist on-field referees in making more accurate decisions.

It involves a team of video officials who review decisions made by the on-field referee using video footage and communication technology.

VAR was conceived by the Refereeing 2.0 project in the early 2010s and under the direction of the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB). The system was tested through mock trials during the 2012–13 season of the Eredivisie, the country's top football league.

In 2016, The International Football Association Board (IFAB), which oversees the Laws of the Game, approved trials for video referees or "live experiments with video assistance for clear errors in match-changing situations".

"The time has come for the debate to be based on evidence," said David Elleray, a former Premier League referee and now technical director of IFAB.

Since its introduction, VAR has been implemented in various football leagues and competitions around the world, including the UEFA Champions League, FIFA World Cup, English Premier League, and many others.

However, it has also sparked discussions and debates among fans, players, coaches, and officials regarding its impact on the game.

## **VAR PROTOCOL (IFAB)**

### **Principles**

The use of VARs in football matches is based on several principles, all of which must apply in every match using VARs.

1. A video assistant referee (VAR) is a match official, with independent access to match footage, who may assist the referee only in the event of a 'clear and obvious error' or 'serious missed incident' in relation to:

**a. Goal/no goal**

**b. Penalty/no penalty**

**c. Direct red card** (not second yellow card/caution)

**d. Mistaken identity** (when the referee cautions or sends off the wrong player of the offending team)

2. The referee must always make a decision, i.e. the referee is not permitted to give 'no decision' and then use the VAR to make the decision; a decision to allow play to continue after an alleged offence can be reviewed.

3. The original decision given by the referee will not be changed unless the video review clearly shows that the decision was a 'clear and obvious error'.

4. Only the referee can initiate a 'review'; the VAR (and other match officials) can only recommend a 'review' to the referee.

5. The final decision is always taken by the referee, either based on information from the VAR or after the referee has undertaken an 'on-field review' (OFR).
6. There is no time limit for the review process as accuracy is more important than speed.
7. The players and team officials must not surround the referee or attempt to influence if a decision is reviewed, the review process or the final decision.
8. The referee must remain 'visible' during the review process to ensure transparency.
9. If play continues after an incident which is then reviewed, any disciplinary action taken/required during the post-incident period is not cancelled, even if the original decision is changed (except a caution/sending-off for stopping or interfering with a promising attack or Denial of Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity).
10. If play has stopped and been restarted, the referee may not undertake a 'review' except for a case of mistaken identity or for a potential sending-off offence relating to violent conduct, spitting, biting or extremely offensive, insulting and/or abusive action(s).
11. The period of play before and after an incident that can be reviewed is determined by the Laws of the Game and VAR protocol.
12. As the VAR will automatically 'check' every situation/decision, there is no need for coaches or players to request a 'review'.

The procedure for use of VAR follows several steps, which have been defined in the IFAB VAR Protocol including an Original Decision, Check, Review and Final Decision. It also explains that as the VAR will automatically check every play, there is no requirement for coaches or players to request a review or check and that the match validity is unaffected by malfunctioning of VAR, wrong decision involving VAR, decision to not review an incident and review of non-reviewable decision.

The entire procedure can be accessed on the IFAB website through the link provided below:

<https://www.theifab.com/laws/latest/video-assistant-referee-var-protocol>

## **Advancements in Technology used in VAR**

Ongoing technological advancements in VAR continue to propel the system forward. Innovations such as improved camera angles, enhanced video analysis software, and real-time communication systems between the referee and VAR officials are being developed to further enhance the accuracy and efficiency of the review process. These advancements aim to reduce the time taken for decision-making and ensure that the game flows smoothly without significant disruptions.

The 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup saw the introduction of connected ball technology and semi-automated offside technology (SAOT), which enabled referees to make quick and accurate decisions on offsides.

The official match ball for Euro 2024 also featured the Adidas connected ball technology. It was the first time this technology was used at the Euros.

Connected ball technology sends precise ball data to VAR officials in real-time. Using player position data with AI, the technology helps UEFA's semi-automated offside technology (SAOT) and plays a key role in supporting faster decisions from the officials in games.

## **Controversy surrounding VAR**

Although the introduction of technology has had various benefits such as fairness and accuracy of decisions, reduced diving, and simulation, it has led to plenty of controversy and disputes among fans and footballers alike.

- Lengthy delays in matches can disrupt the flow of the game and frustrate fans in the stadium and those watching at home.
- Goal celebrations have also been affected by VAR. Fans and players often hesitate to celebrate immediately after a goal due to the uncertainty of VAR reviews. This has taken away some of the spontaneity and joy associated with scoring.
- Although VAR can eliminate factual errors, it struggles to remove the subjective nature of certain calls such as handballs, fouls, and offsides due to lack of implementation of adidas' ball technology.
- The interpretation of offside decisions has been particularly contentious. The use of lines and technology to measure millimetre-accurate offside positions has led to many close calls and disputes. The rule that "any

part of the body that can legally play the ball is considered for offside" has also been a source of confusion.

- Controversies had led to the Premier League conducting a vote on whether VAR use should be continued.
- VAR may also fail to intervene at times due to reluctance of referees, as witnessed on various occasions.

## **A FEW CONTROVERSIES FROM LAST SEASON**

- Luis Diaz' goal was disallowed during the Tottenham Hotspur vs Liverpool FC game last season. The goal was disallowed by on-field referees due to offside without any VAR intervention. One may argue that this game-defining moment could have caused a different result if the goal was allowed, as the game ended with Tottenham winning 2-1.
- Another one was when Arsenal played Manchester United last September and Referee Antony Taylor gave a penalty for Aaron Wan-Bissaka's foul on Kai Havertz, only for the penalty decision to be overturned because the VAR felt the contact was not sufficient to bring Havertz down. Although the decision here did not have an impact on the match result which ended 3-1 in favour of Arsenal, there is a need to discuss the subjectivity of such calls and whether there should be changes made to the current VAR procedure. There are several such examples which can be found at the top level which can be brought up to explain a point during the flow of debate.

## **CONCLUSION**

The introduction of VAR in football has been a significant step forward in improving the fairness and accuracy of decision-making. While it has its share of controversies and challenges, it also offers opportunities for refining and enhancing the game. As the technology and the rules surrounding VAR continue to evolve, the future of football officiating appears poised for a more informed, consistent, and fair era.

Ultimately, the success of VAR lies in its ability to strike a balance between preserving the essence of the game and using technology to minimize errors. Football's continued pursuit of fairness and accuracy will undoubtedly shape the future of VAR, as it becomes an integral part of the beautiful game.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

Q. Is there a need to make a change to the current method of use of VAR, or does the current state of VAR adversely affect the game?

Q. What moments are considered “game-defining”?

Q. Can subjective decisions be made more objective in any manner?

Q. How can you define “subjective” decisions in football?

Q. What further innovation could be made to help enhance decisions?