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Sabir Ismayilov

“On the road for becoming a top-class referee in football-general requirements and
the situation in Azerbaijan”

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Supervisor: Tim Pawlowski

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the potential path to becoming a top-class referee and the overall situation of refereeing in Azerbaijan. It describes the general requirements of a referee, such as good knowledge of the Laws of the Game, good physical condition, self-confidence, language, and management skills. Referee bias and favoritism will be discussed, mostly as regards the top five leagues. However, the most important point will refer to the situation in refereeing in Azerbaijan. The study uses expert interviews in order to show relative information in this regard. Experts are from the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) and will answer the questions on weakness and strength sides and challenges that referees face on the road of the international arena as well.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND MOTIVATION

Match officials in football are responsible for controlling the games, follow the regulations, and punish those who committed fouls. Moreover, referees have to deal with safety issues during the games. Certain environmental conditions hinder the task of properly refereeing games. On the one hand, referees might make (unintended) mistakes in their judgments like any other human being while conducting a task. Mistakes in refereeing might have far-reaching consequences. As such, referees are naturally confronted with a high-pressure situation to not make any mistakes. This is reinforced by pressure from spectators in the stadium, head coaches, club officials, and the media. Particularly broadcasted games enable TV viewers via slow-motion reviews from different camera perspectives to eventually even better evaluate a certain situation during the game than a referee who is taking the decision. On the other hand, the particular environment of games, might even lead to intentionally biased referee decisions during games. For instance, pressure by (home) fans might lead to (home team) favoritism of referees. Moreover, recent bribery scandals reveal the general incentives to cheat.

This thesis will deal with the situation of referees in general as well as referees in Azerbaijan in particular. People who are working in this field in Azerbaijan can easily identify big reforms in terms of preparation, trainings, seminars, the administrative side of refereeing, etc. Still, however, only very few referees become referees at an international level.

Hence, the main research question in this thesis is: Why referees from Azerbaijan are not regularly amongst top-class referees at an international level?

INTRODUCTION

Background

As such, refereeing in professional football is not an easy and straightforward task. In order to become a professional referee, she or he needs to have in-depth knowledge about the game, good communication and language skills, self-confidence to give good decisions as well as physical fitness (Study.com, 2018). In this regard, Werner Helsen notes, that the governing body of European professional football, i.e. the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), makes preparation and fitness trainings as priorities. Moreover, he recommends referees to keep control of dietary stuffs (Uefa.com, 2019). Likewise, referees should be ready for modern football game requirements, and hence, it is crucial for them to keep going on their own development. All referees (the head of the referee, the assistant referees and the fourth official) must adapt to modern football in terms of high speed, and new changes. Moreover, match officials have to be self-confident not to be afraid to give a decision in spite of having pressure by media, spectators, and club officials. It is one of the main features of the referee to have the ability to take a decision as a blink of an eye (Uefa.com, 2019).

There is rising literature of favorable treatment in the context of football. This implies both during the games and when it comes to club management. Subjective treatment of specific individuals is seen in promotions especially, where those people who really deserved to be in the promotion zone get left out. This is an example of the principal- agent relationship, where it could lead to a market failure and inefficiency. The author has investigated principal- agent problems in the context of favoritism in workplaces. His questionnaire directly asked the workers about fair treatment and honesty. However, since data collection is costly and not reliable, it could have brought the wrong results (Buraimo, 2011, p.329).

Influencing factors in refereein

One of the factors that influence human behavior is the social environment. A combination of psychology and economics have resulted in an emergence of behavioral economics- a recent field of study that looks at people's psychology when it comes to making economic decisions. The economists also utilized the data from football leagues to investigate the effects of social pressure on the behavior and decision making of the referee. In an empirical study, the authors have found that referees had home team bias decisions in the Spanish league. The main unit of measurement was 'the addition of extra time' by the referees if the home team is behind. However, this technique has received criticism from the academia. The addition of extra time could have been mixed up with the home team's intentional time-wasting attempts when they are on the lead. This limitation has been worked on and new alternative measures of referee bias were formulated. For instance, in their article, Reilly used the penalty awards to measure the referee favoritism in German Bundesliga and took penalties and extra time. In another study, Reilly investigated the number of cards awarded in European Cup matches. And finally, the author preferred the relationship between fouls and cautionary cards in Italian matches. It was used to determine referee bias by looking at their reaction to the fouls committed by the home team and social pressure. The decision of sending a player off makes the team vulnerable and in especially the case of the home team, the crowd pressure will be immense (Reilly, 2013).

For a long time, football fans suffer from a home match aspect, which is measured by several factors, such as familiar staff, the range of home team spectators, travel factors, and so on, however, there is another advantage which is also a big handicap for world football. Additional times given by referees at the end of a match is considered compensation for pauses in the game. There are several types of possible stoppages during a match, including medical pauses, substitutions, disciplinary sanctions, goal celebrations, and so on. According to Carlos Lago-Penas and Maite Gomez-Lopez (2016), referee favoritism plays a key role in big teams in

the Spanish La Liga; when a big team is winning a game, referees try their best to finish the game as soon as possible. Conversely, if a big team is losing, they attempt to prolong the game as much as possible. This assessment was based on all 380 matches of the 2014-2015 season of Spanish La Liga. Carlos Lago-Penas and Maite Gomez-Lopez (2016) noted several factors in order to clarify for everyone in this regard. Several factors related to the topic were discussed clearly. For instance, the reasons for extra time in the second half of the match included yellow cards, red cards, number of spectators, substitutions, the away team's style of play, and other issues which directly affected the result of the game. Home teams also have more opportunities for penalty kicks and fewer red cards than away teams.

The International Football Association Board (IFAB) was founded in 1886 and aimed to combine the laws of football. Originally, there were just four football associations, the English, Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish Federation Associations, and they had a right to vote individually. FIFA became a part of the IFAB in 1913, which currently consists of 211 national associations. The IFAB aims to be a society for all who follow the Laws of the Game, to help the world of football in the framework of fairness, to modify the laws when it is needed and to deliver the football community in the right way.

There have been various discussions about introducing new technology to the world of football. On 5 March 2016, the annual meeting of the International Football Association Board (IFAB) confirmed the use of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system as an experiment during football matches. The VAR system will be given opportunities in terms of decision-making by referees and had a massive impact on the outcomes of matches. With the help of the new technology, referees will be able to avoid making mistakes in a single fixture. Referees watch the particular episode on the screen (an on-field review) in two ways: if they have any doubts about a specific episode they can watch again on the screen on their own, or the VAR can communicate with the head of the referees via a headset and recommend that they watch the episode again.

This paper includes a discussion of the points mentioned as regards refereeing in Azerbaijan. Two expert interviews were held, and represent the Referee Committee of Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA). According to the interviews conducted with two experts, interviewees will touch on points in terms of the general requirements of refereeing, referee bias and favoritism, refereeing in Azerbaijan, implementing (VAR) technology and the reasons that Azerbaijani referees cannot be represented regularly at international level matches are league performance and language skills.

CHAPTER I

STATE OF RESEARCH

1.1. Referee bias and favoritism

Traditionally, referees are appointed by certain principals (e.g. a national football federation or league) and required to be nonpartisan. Objectivity is the core of professional judgments, however, subjective interpretations and biased evaluations often occur. In general, subjective decision-making and biased dynamics can be seen in the judiciary, human resources recruitment, in evaluations and treatment in the working environment, in state or business funding processes, and in the many other fields of management. Rickman and Witt (2008) emphasized how favoritism plays an essential role in terms of biased decision making, and may affect various economic conditions. Similarly, political biases may impact the distribution of public goods.

Since then, the focus was on football clubs, because clubs have an obligation to inform the public about their management and player statistics. This includes player data, injury periods, who are the coaches of the club, and so on. Referee bias will be examined in this part of the thesis, and the factors that may influence referee decisions. The first case study involves UEFA, where the referees are appointed in a way that means they cannot favor a club or a player (for example, no German referee if one of the contestants is from the Bundesliga). The second case for analysis will be the Spanish Primera Liga. The results show that although there are steps taken to minimize referee bias in UEFA contests, favoritism still persists. We probably find evidence of referee bias in Spain's La Liga as well. A discussion of the results will follow next.

Referee bias will be measured in this paper by the sanctions they impose on the players who caused infractions or who acts against professional soccer. The rules are set by FIFA, and legally binding. This means that a FIFA member club cannot make new rules that are not stated in the FIFA charter. In general, the duty of the referees is to make sure that the players respect the rules of football, and to penalize those who do otherwise. Such interventions vary from a simple warning to awarding a free kick,

and from giving a yellow card to the expulsion of a player from the game by a red card with no replacement allowed. If a player gets two yellow cards in a game, it equals by a red card, meaning expulsion from the match. Referee sanctions will be used as a proxy for measuring the possible favoritism in the football matches (Buraimo, 2011, p.331).

1.2. Referee Bias in China

Petrovic and Ljupko (2000) emphasized several interesting points with regard to how refereeing is a threat to China's soccer. In 2000, European national teams gathered in the Netherlands and Belgium for EURO 2000. EURO 2000 did not involve in good refereeing, however. Unfortunately, world football witnessed serious mistakes by referees which directly affected the games' results. According to China's Soccer Newspaper, Chinese spectators criticized the referee Zhu Liuyi during the league match between Shenyang Haishi and Beijing Guo for making poor decisions. Beijing won the game with the help of the decisions made by Zhu Liuyi. This happened regularly in China's football league. The Chinese Football Association announced that they had fined 10 referees due to serious mistakes. Soccer Newspaper also reported proof of fixing matches. In spite of all this, the Chinese Football Association admitted by facing handicaps in refereeing. During these three months, even the Beijing Guo team became the victim of poor refereeing as well, whilst they won the game at the hand of the referee. As a result, the Chinese Football Association supports its referees who had a huge negative impact on games in the Chinese football league (Petrovic and Lujopko, 2000, n.p).

1.3. Home Advantage

Several empirical studies (Rickman and Witt,2008) show such biases in soccer. For example, referees in the Spanish La Liga have been found to regularly add more 'injury time' when the away team is almost winning the game. Additional time can affect the away team's play and even the results of a game. This is seen as favoritism

due to as spectators' pressure of the home team (see Rickman & Witt, 2008). Similarly, Lovell, Newell, and Parker (2014) found that those soccer referees from the English Premier League show bias in favor of home teams. As a result of these studies several measures were proposed in order to reduce or even mitigate such biases. Incentives for referees and principals are required in order to match their objectives, and to ensure that referees behave in accordance with the interests of those who appointed them.

Table 1. Variable descriptions and summary statistics

Variable name	Variable description	Summary statistics
Red card	= 1 if the player received a red disciplinary card in a match (i.e. dismissal); = 0 otherwise	0.0059
Yellow card	= 1 if the player received a yellow disciplinary card in a match; = 0 otherwise	0.1124
Fouls called	The total number of fouls committed by the player in a match	1.0353 (1.213)
Number of prior games played	The number of games played by the player in the current season prior to the current game	13.464 (9.129)
'Veteran' player	= 1 if the player is over 32 years of age at the start of the relevant season; = 0 otherwise	0.1173
Relative league position	The difference in league position between the home team and the away team prior to the start of the current game	0.2026 (5.779)
'Derby' game	= 1 if the game is a 'derby' game; = 0 otherwise	0.1347
Home fixture	= 1 if the game is a home game; = 0 otherwise	0.5003
Ln(attendance)	The natural log of the attendance at the game	10.390 (0.354)

The table above summarizes the data from five seasons of the English Premier League to determine referee home bias and the possibility of crowd pressure in deciding whether to send a player off. The results suggest that expulsion from the game is also affected by whether the player is a veteran, the team's relative position on the leader board and if it is a derby game, which attracts a significant proportion of fans. The results align with the conclusions made of Buraimo and others. Although there is a correlation, there is no significant evidence that social pressure impacts a referee's decisions in a way which requires further investigation (Reilly, 2013).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Extra time, second half (sec)	119	420	230.6	67.10
Score difference	-6	6	0.37	1.97
Opponent level	-17	16	0.1	8.13
Yellow cards, second half	0	10	3.63	1.99
Red cards, second half	0	2	0.17	0.45
Players substitutions, second half	3	6	5.71	0.57
Average attendance	31.11	100	70.56	16.12
Fouls committed, second half	3	23	15.31	3.87

All the independent variables are shown in Table 1, which refers to descriptive statistics of the study. The independent variables such as score difference, opponent level, yellow cards in the second half, red cards in the second half and others are measured for the dependent variable, which is a referee's additional time after 90 minutes. Score difference is the difference between clubs after a referee's additional times are added to the regular time (Peñas and Lopez, 2016).

Table 2. Effect of match variables of extra time added to the second halves of games.

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Model 1					
Score difference	-2.60	2.15	-0.08	-1.21	.23
Score difference ²	-4.08	0.61	-0.43	-6.70	.01
Opponent level	-0.23	0.60	-0.03	-0.39	.70
Score difference × Opponent level					
Score difference ² × Opponent level					
Yellow cards (second half)	0.54	2.64	0.02	0.21	.84
Red cards (second half)	28.85	10.46	0.21	1.71	.01
Player substitutions (second half)	6.55	9.95	0.06	0.66	.52
Attendance/capacity	-0.17	0.33	-0.04	-0.52	.60
Fouls committed (second half)	2.32	1.20	0.14	1.93	.05
Constant	177.81	73.31		2.43	.02
R ²	.33				
Adj R ²	.28				
Cohen's f ²	.48				
Observations	380				
Model 2					
Score difference	-4.76	2.84	-0.15	-1.68	.09
Score difference ²	-2.71	0.79	-0.29	-3.45	.01
Opponent level	-0.46	0.63	-0.06	-0.74	.46
Score difference × Opponent level	0.71	0.32	0.21	2.26	.03
Score difference ² × Opponent level	-0.03	0.08	-0.05	-0.37	.71
Yellow cards (second half)	-0.27	2.48	-0.02	-0.11	.92
Red cards (second half)	30.21	16.09	0.21	1.88	.05
Player substitutions (second half)	6.20	9.70	0.06	0.64	.52
Attendance/capacity	-0.15	0.33	-0.04	-0.44	.66
Fouls committed (second half)	2.24	1.18	0.14	1.90	.05
Constant	183.05	70.97		2.58	.01
R ²	.34				
Adj R ²	.29				
Cohen's f ²	.52				
Observations	380				

Garciano, Palacios-Huerta and Prendergast (2005) concluded that referees in the Spanish league added extra time towards the end of the game, justifying it as 'injury time' when the home team was losing compared to when the home team is winning. As we can see, referee bias includes not only sanctions against players, but also referee decisions about the flow of the game. The same result was found in the

English Premier League as well, but the enforcement of salary contracts for referees. This implies that referees are likely to be fair when there are financial incentives.

Sanctioning the players using yellow and red cards can also be used for measuring referee favoritism. The idea of a yellow card is to encourage a player to play carefully and curb their anger, otherwise, a resulting yellow card will exclude them from the game. A player must also think about their reputation and being awarded red cards is usually a sign of not being in the First XI for the next match. Buraimo, Simmons & Maciaszczyk (2011) showed that teams which receive a red card are more likely to lose opposing 11 players due to psychological demotivation and the physical absence of a player on the field. This could also explain why, when there is a clash of players and one is mildly injured, their team defend them by asking the referee to give a yellow card (or a red card if the case is serious) to the rival player. The fans are aware of this and they will always cheer when a rival team is carded.

Buraimo, Forrest and Simmons (2011) have found that teams tend to demonstrate an aggressive play style when they are behind their rivals during away games. Naturally, a more aggressive play style will result in more cards being awarded, which has nothing to do with referee bias. When the away team is behind and there is not much time left until the end of the match, there can even be minor fights which involve pushing players in a more violent way. This was acknowledged that there was a bias towards home teams in the English Premier League and German Bundesliga 1. An interesting insight is that the removal of running tracks around the field could cause referee bias as well. The running tracks create a space between the fans and the players and people on the bench. The distance means that it is less likely that a referee will be influenced by the crowd when making decisions. The result showed that when stadiums removed running tracks the home teams received fewer yellow and red cards. A referee is under pressure from fans of the home team when they are very close, and there are more fans present for a home team.

1.4. Referee Bias in La Liga and the UEFA Champions League

Now, we look at the Spanish Primera Liga and UEFA Champions League competitions and analyze whether there is referee bias. The Spanish Primera Liga (commonly known as La Liga) hosts football giants such as Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid, and Barcelona, three teams that have finished the term on top of the leader board. Other teams are relatively mediocre and small, and it is harder for them to compete against teams that possess well-known superstars. It is also important to note that Spain is a big country and some clubs travel long distances for certain matches. This will be reflected in the participation of fans in the game and will result in more bias towards the home team for obvious reasons. The situation is slightly different for England, which is a smaller country with a well-developed transportation network.

The 2003-2007 period has been chosen as a case study for La Liga and UEFA CL. In Spain, the referees are appointed by the central committee called the Spanish Football Association. By contrast, UEFA is trying not to appoint a referee that has some connection to one of the playing teams by a country of origin. This is an attempt by UEFA to be as much impartial and unbiased as possible, but still, the referees are subject to psychological pressure from the crowd and could make biased decisions.

TABLE 1
Distribution of Cards Per Game by Season in the Primera Liga

Season	Home Yellow	Away Yellow	Home Second Yellow	Away Second Yellow	Home Red	Away Red	Number of Games
2003-2004	2.53	2.84	0.08	0.11	0.09	0.09	380
2004-2005	2.29	2.77	0.06	0.10	0.06	0.07	380
2005-2006	2.48	2.85	0.07	0.12	0.10	0.09	380
2006-2007	2.46	3.05	0.03	0.04	0.11	0.12	380
Total	2.45	2.89	0.06	0.09	0.09	0.09	1,520

TABLE 2

Distribution of Cards Per Game by Season in the Champions League

Season	Home Yellow	Away Yellow	Home Second Yellow	Away Second Yellow	Home Red	Away Red	Number of Games
2003-2004	1.17	1.90	0.06	0.09	0.04	0.02	125
2004-2005	1.45	1.72	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.05	125
2005-2006	1.29	2.02	0.03	0.12	0.03	0.03	125
2006-2007	1.53	1.98	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.06	125
Total	1.35	1.90	0.03	0.09	0.03	0.04	500

As seen from the tables, the probability of away team getting a yellow card is high in both La Liga and Champions League matches. Chances of getting a second yellow card are slightly higher for the away team than the home team as well.

Other variables that affect the gameplay. These include the overall attendance in the game, if the game is a derby, the goal difference and the fact that if the game is played in the group stage, quarterfinal, or final.

TABLE 3
 Summary Statistics for Primera Liga ($n = 135,720$)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Track	0.19	0.39	0	1
Attendance	28,973.42	18,127.63	2,500	98,200
Derby	0.06	0.24	0	1
Difference in bookmaker probability	0.18	0.25	-0.58	0.78
Home yellow last 3 min	0.08	0.28	0	4
Away yellow last 3 min	0.09	0.31	0	5
Home yellow prior	0.76	1.07	0	8
Away yellow prior	0.97	1.22	0	8
Home second yellow and red	0.04	0.20	0	3
Away second yellow and red	0.05	0.23	0	3
Goal difference	0.15	1.06	-6	5

TABLE 4
Summary Statistics for Champions League

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Champions League group stage (n = 31,500)</i>				
Track	0.22	0.41	0	1
Attendance	39,094.55	18,086.47	4,000	98,000
Derby	0.01	0.08	0	1
Difference in bookmaker probability	0.21	0.31	-0.60	0.81
Home team qualified from group stage	0.01	0.09	0	1
Away team qualified from group stage	0.01	0.12	0	1
Goal difference	0.26	1.12	-5	7
Home yellow last 3 min	0.04	0.21	0	2
Away yellow last 3 min	0.06	0.24	0	2
Home yellow prior	0.47	0.76	0	5
Away yellow prior	0.67	0.95	0	5
Home second yellow and red	0.01	0.12	0	2
Away second yellow and red	0.04	0.20	0	2
<i>Champions League knockout stage (n = 10,500)</i>				
Track	0.17	0.37	0	1
Attendance	50,643.08	19,718.78	15,000	98,436
Derby	0.07	0.26	0	1
Difference in bookmaker probability	0.19	0.22	-0.29	0.65
First leg goal difference	-0.20	0.87	-3	3
Quarter final	0.28	0.45	0	1
Semi final	0.14	0.35	0	1
Goal difference	0.27	1.01	-3	6
Home yellow last 3 min	0.05	0.21	0	2
Away yellow last 3 min	0.07	0.25	0	2
Home yellow prior	0.52	0.83	0	6
Away yellow prior	0.75	0.96	0	6
Home second yellow and red	0.02	0.13	0	1
Away second yellow and red	0.03	0.18	0	2

The results confirm the study by Buraimo, Forrest and Simmons (2010). In La Liga, it was found that chances of getting a yellow card are higher for the away team if there are no running tracks in the stadium. It further confirms the psychological and

social pressure theory. The same result applies for UEFA Champions League matches, where the chances of a player from the away team being dismissed are lower, if there is a distance between fans and the referee, which is an indication of referee bias.

An analysis of crowd attendance at La Liga shows that the referee is likely to award a yellow card to the away team. This is explained by the fact that the majority of the crowd will cheer for the home team and deciding against them might infuriate the crowd. So, it can be said that cards are sometimes given to appease the crowd.

CHAPTER II

VAR TECHNOLOGY

2.1. Concept and definition

From the spectator's perspective, it may seem easy to make correct decisions during the game, however, referees usually face challenges in terms of making decisions based on the Law of Game, the pace of game and in unclear situations. In order to avoid mistakes which directly affect the ultimate outcome, and to support referees, several new technologies are nowadays in use in the sporting world. The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) is a supportive tool for referees, allowing them a second chance to make better decisions (Carlos & Anton, 2019).

First of all, the Netherlands Football Association practiced VAR for the first time in the season of 2012-2013 with positive results. In 2018, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) proposed that the Laws of the Game include the VAR system and referees are now able to watch the matches again in situations of involving the red card, a penalty, goals and mistaken identity. The procedure is very simple, when such a situation occurs, the VAR referee instantly communicates with the head referee with the help of a headset. The head referee discusses the situation with the VAR referee, and whether to play on whether or any fouls have been committed. The conversation between the head referee and the VAR referee cannot take more time in order to make a decision, unless the head referee goes to watch the episode on the monitor by themselves. The VAR system was implemented in some TOP 5 leagues such as Italy Serie A and German Bundesliga, from the 2017-2018 football season (Carlos & Anton, 2019).

IFAB brought new technology and made a great contribution to the world of football. This kind of innovation provides full support in terms of security and creates a fair situation. But, what about traditional football? Does innovation better than traditional football? Of course, innovation brings new tastes to football, and it will not be the same as before; some fans will not enjoy the excitement of football and the pace of the match will be declined as well. If the referee communicates with the VAR

referee regarding every potential foul, the game will begin to look strange, and the spectators are going to blame those who introduced the VAR system. The head of the referees will therefore only use the VAR system in four cases: *goals, penalties, red cards (not second yellow cards), and mistaken identity* where referees misidentify an offended player. Referees communicate with the VAR referee via a headset to discuss whether they made mistakes or play should continue. If serious fouls are identified by the VAR referee, then it directly contacts the head of the referees and recommend that they watch the episode again on the screen next to the technical area. No one is allowed to come close to the screen while referees are watching the episodes. In the meantime, the referees discuss the situation with the VAR referee and, shortly after this the head of the referees will give a caution for the committed foul or restart the game. The VAR system thus makes better and more fair decisions possible (Armenteros, 2020).

There have been so many referee errors in history that it would be highly impractical to list them all. They include decisions made by the referees that proved to be wrong later, and greatly affected the flow of the game, and even affected the final decision about which team would receive a title. Those mistakes left many fans experiencing either in frustration or joy, and many people believe that those mistakes are the part of the game, and add a uniqueness to football. Advances in technology and its integration with tennis, rugby and so on mean that people started believing that it should also be integrated into football due to its significant audience and the economic profits that generated. Gianni Infantino, who became the President of FIFA in 2016, believed that VAR technology would be a useful tool for avoiding mistakes and questionable episodes (Armenteros, 2020).

For example, in the 1966 World Cup final game, Geoff Hurst scored a “ghost goal” for England. It was a game against West Germany which ended with a score of 2-2 in the main playing time, and extra time was thus to be played. There was an important episode in the 101st minute of the game, where Geoff Hurst scored from the penalty kick area, but it looked like the goalkeeper was covering the ball and it was hard to see whether was in fact a goal. Gottfried Dienst, the referee of the game

concluded that it was a goal, which was followed by the fourth goal, and England won the 1966 final. It is still debated today whether the ball passed beyond the line (Armenteros, 2020).

The VAR system is an advantage for both referees and football in general. Football fans, however, criticize new technology like the VAR system which directly affects the pace of the game by pausing it; in other words, it interrupts the fans who are enjoying the match.

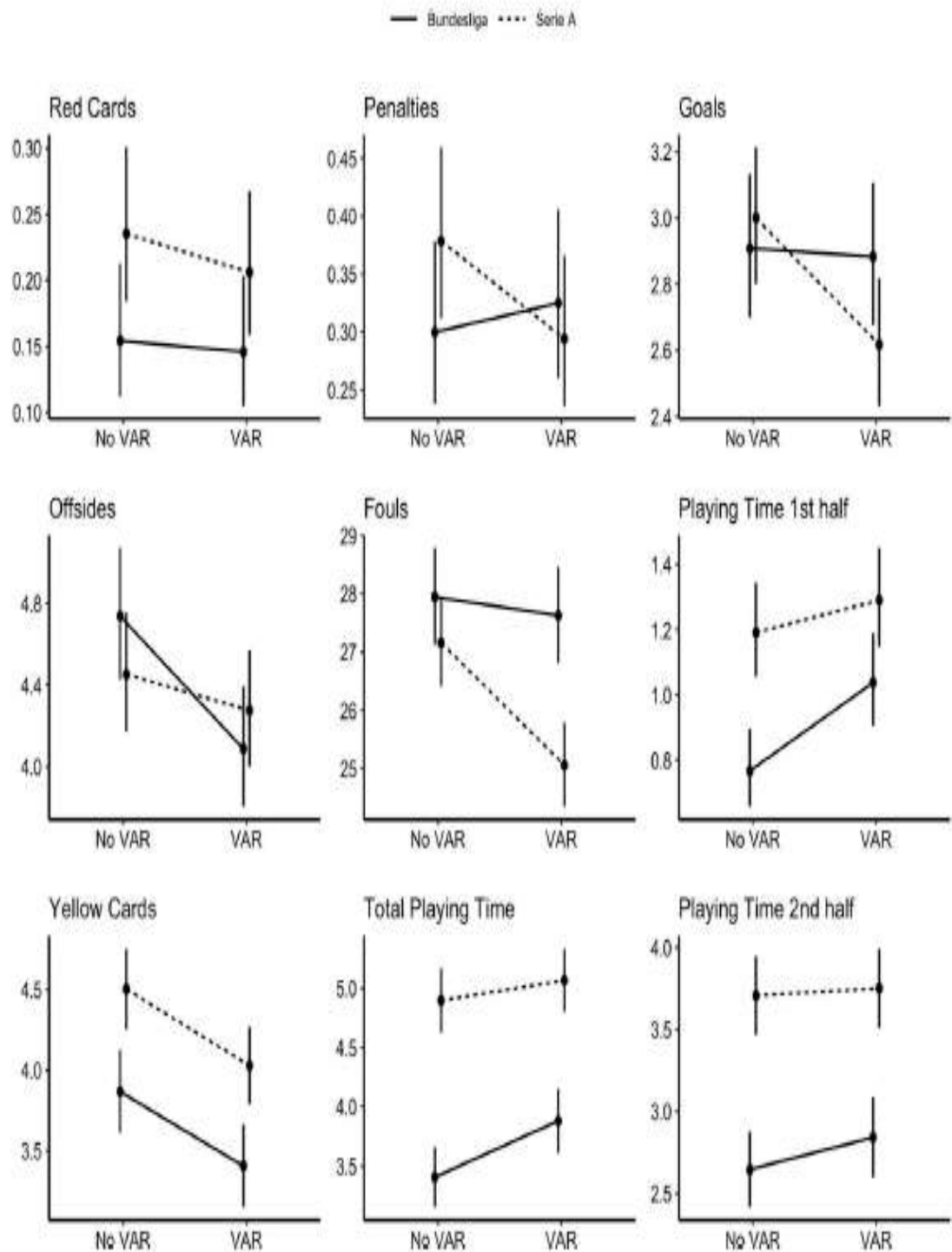
2.2. VAR system in serie A and bundesliga

Carlos and Anton (2019) emphasized that the goal of the study is to analyze generally about the VAR system and its impact on football. Furthermore, they made the research in detailed format with regard to increase in the number of minutes and at the same time number of red and yellow cards with the help of VAR system, on the other hand, goals, offsides and others will not be modified by VAR system (Carlos & Anton,2019).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Total				Bundesliga				Serie A			
	No VAR		VAR		No VAR		VAR		No VAR		VAR	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Fouls	27.5	6.18	26.3	6.65	27.9	5.96	27.6	6.60	27.2	6.36	25.1	6.48
Goals	2.96	1.80	2.74	1.66	2.91	1.81	2.88	1.68	3.00	1.79	2.62	1.64
Offsides	4.59	2.41	4.19	2.46	4.74	2.54	4.09	2.44	4.45	2.28	4.28	2.47
Penalties	0.34	0.57	0.31	0.55	0.30	0.52	0.33	0.58	0.38	0.61	0.29	0.53
Playing Time 1st half	45.99	1.04	46.17	1.32	45.77	0.91	46.04	1.30	46.19	1.11	46.29	1.33
Playing Time 2nd half	48.21	1.56	48.32	1.71	47.65	1.52	47.84	1.63	48.71	1.42	48.75	1.67
Total Playing Time	94.20	2.03	94.51	2.18	93.40	1.93	93.88	2.14	94.90	1.86	95.07	2.06
Red Cards	0.20	0.47	0.18	0.43	0.15	0.40	0.15	0.38	0.24	0.52	0.21	0.46
Yellow Cards	4.21	2.02	3.74	2.12	3.87	1.96	3.40	2.11	4.50	2.03	4.03	2.09

Figure 1 demonstrates Serie A and Bundesliga with and without VAR seasons. By comparing these seasons in both leagues, we can see that reduction the number of goals in Serie A, accordingly the offsides in Bundesliga and yellow cards applied in both Serie A and Bundesliga.



As most of the countries applied the VAR system in their football league, we observe a decrease in fouls and fouls in general. Football players try not to commit more fouls more, it makes them less aggressive and we also see fewer medical officials than before. The VAR system offers a second chance to make better decisions and therefore players have to take into consideration their acts in the field

of play in terms of fouls, misbehavior, and so on. Overall, the number of fouls, offsides, and violations of rules has declined as a result of using the VAR system (Carlos & Anton,2019).

Assistant referees frequently make offside mistakes which is more probably referred to restraint in perception. In other words, these kinds of mistakes due to a linesman being in a bad position. On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that the human factor plays a key role in this regard. Considering the pace of the fixture in the modern football, it is not an easy job for the linesman to catch an offside and follow each player of the attacking team to ensure they do not break the rules. It is normal for referees to make mistakes. The VAR system is considered a supportive tool to help prevent these kinds of mistakes. The VAR system means that match officials lift their flags less than before (Carlos & Anton, 2019).

The implementation of the VAR system has had various effects in both Serie A and Bundesliga. For example, there has been a decrease in the number of fouls and offsides in German Bundesliga, and the number of goals and yellow cards has decreased in Serie A. This research shows that the VAR system has had an effect in terms of changing points of view about the game and the game's culture.

2.3. Different views of VAR

It has been claimed that the VAR system plays a role in terms of reducing capabilities of referees. The idea is that humans can make mistakes, which is a normal issue due to external and objective factors, and technology can prevent wrong decisions by referees. Proponents of the VAR accept that the VAR system leads interruptions to the game, however, the system makes sure the game is fairly played and that offenders will be punished for their actions (Armenteros, 2020, p.4).

We begin by looking at the most obvious and disturbing mistakes in the history of football, where referee mistakes have caused public debate and sports fans have discussed whether technology would be helpful in order to avoid such mistakes. We will then look at what players, coaches, managers and referees think about VAR by

examining publicly available data and their interviews with the press and media. The impact of this technology on the main actors mentioned above will be analyzed. The people affected by the changes in technology have expressed their thoughts to the international press and media (Armenteros, 2020, p.4).

Before the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia, the VAR system was tested in different leagues and competitions. VAR played a central role in avoiding mistakes by referees in 2016, during the Club World Cup in Japan. For example, during the semi-final between Kashima Antler and Atletico Nacional, a referee awarded a penalty using VAR, but it took two minutes for the referee to make a final decision. This caused outrage among the fans because of the time wasted in the game, which highlighted the need for improvements in communication between the referees and the use of VAR. These communication problems persisted in another game, between Real Madrid and Club America and prompted media attention. These problems with communication were the starting points of criticism against the VAR system (Armenteros, 2020, p.6).

Real Madrid midfielder Luka Modric did not favor the VAR system, and said the following: “I do not like this video-arbitration because it creates a lot of confusion. I hope this rule does not continue, for me it is not football.” Later, he also added that referees and players meet before the game and to get acquainted with the new technology, but that he did not listen attentively. “[...] because I hope that this rule does not continue.” Lucas Vasquez was also confused about VAR, stating that it was weird to wait for the referee to decide by looking at a screen. “It’s a little weird to wait for someone to decide from the outside. Perhaps the essence of football, which are the decisions taken on the spot, is lost a little.” Although the club manager, Zinedine Zidane was not favoring the VAR system, he said this: “Things should be clearer for everyone, more so if the technology wants to improve them” (Armenteros, 2020, p.6).

Italy and Portugal were the first countries to introduce VAR in their leagues. It was widely perceived that there is a need to make necessary improvements in the system, and the use of VAR began to gain popularity among fans, as it reduced errors

made by the referees. There were no doubts, however, that the controversies would continue.

In Germany, the public was mostly against the VAR system due to its ineffectiveness. After controversial episodes, the decision making body of Bundesliga has decided not to use VAR in offside decisions. The sporting media reported that 47% of 219 players were against the new technology, and 42% saw it as positive. The remaining 11% were neither in favor nor against the implementation of VAR (Armenteros, 2020, p.11).

There were technical and communication problems in Serie A matches after first implementation of the VAR system in Italy, which created tension not only among the fan base, but also the players themselves. For instance, Gianluigi Buffon, Juventus's goalkeeper, stated his concerns about VAR after the game against Genoa. Two penalties were awarded to Genoa in the match after consulting with VAR. Gigi Buffon said about the new technology: "I do not like VAR like that, we are going over the top. This seems more like water polo, not every contact in the area should be sanctioned. And I say it to my regret, because Juve attack, and with this system, we would get 55 penalties. But this is no longer football, it is laboratory football." In short, he claims that games without errors are not fun anymore and that mistakes are part of football in essence (Armenteros, 2020, p.12).

Our next case will be the UEFA Super Cup final in 2017. Real Madrid won against Manchester United with a score of 2-1, and the non-existent VAR system was a decisive factor. Jose Mourinho, the manager of Manchester United stated that the result would not have been the same if VAR had been used, since the first goal for Real Madrid was from offside, and a decision to not count it as a goal would have drastically changed the gameplay. Jose Mourinho was one of the few managers who supported the implementation of VAR: "We all need it. Professionals cannot lose or win matches and titles because of a refusal of this evolution. Sponsors, owners and investors must feel that technology is there. Also, referees especially need and deserve protection. They need the technology to help them, protect them and support them." (Armenteros, 2020, p.12)

VAR was used in several leagues from the 2018-2019 season such as Italian Serie A, German Bundesliga, Spain La Liga, and the English Premier League. In this study, fans give their thoughts about VAR technology; for instance, Serie A fans mentioned that the VAR system was a very good technology in terms of fairness and security, although of course, the system has several shortcomings which should be studied and which will hopefully be developed further.

2.4. VAR team and camera distribution

For the upcoming referees in the VAR area, factors such as equipment and technology are significant in terms of preparation, and to learn the VAR system well. In general, the new generation will be one step ahead to absorbing such knowledge and putting it into practice (Armenteros, 2020).

VARs and Assistant of VARs (AVAR) are also considered as match officials according to the protocol, however, they are recognized as video match officials while the main staff are defined as on-field officials. Skills required in order to be a VAR, include stable attention during the match, and the ability to manage different monitors. Being the elite or first category does not play a significant role in this regard, the referee needs particular skills as mentioned above (Armenteros, 2020). Of course, there should be several specific camera positions in order to analyze episodes by VAR in different ways. It is necessary for cameras to be placed properly. For example, during a match between Aves and Boavista in a Portuguese league game, the referee was not able to review footage because a fan of Boavista waved a flag in front of the camera, which made it difficult for the referee to analyze the case (Armenteros, 2020.)

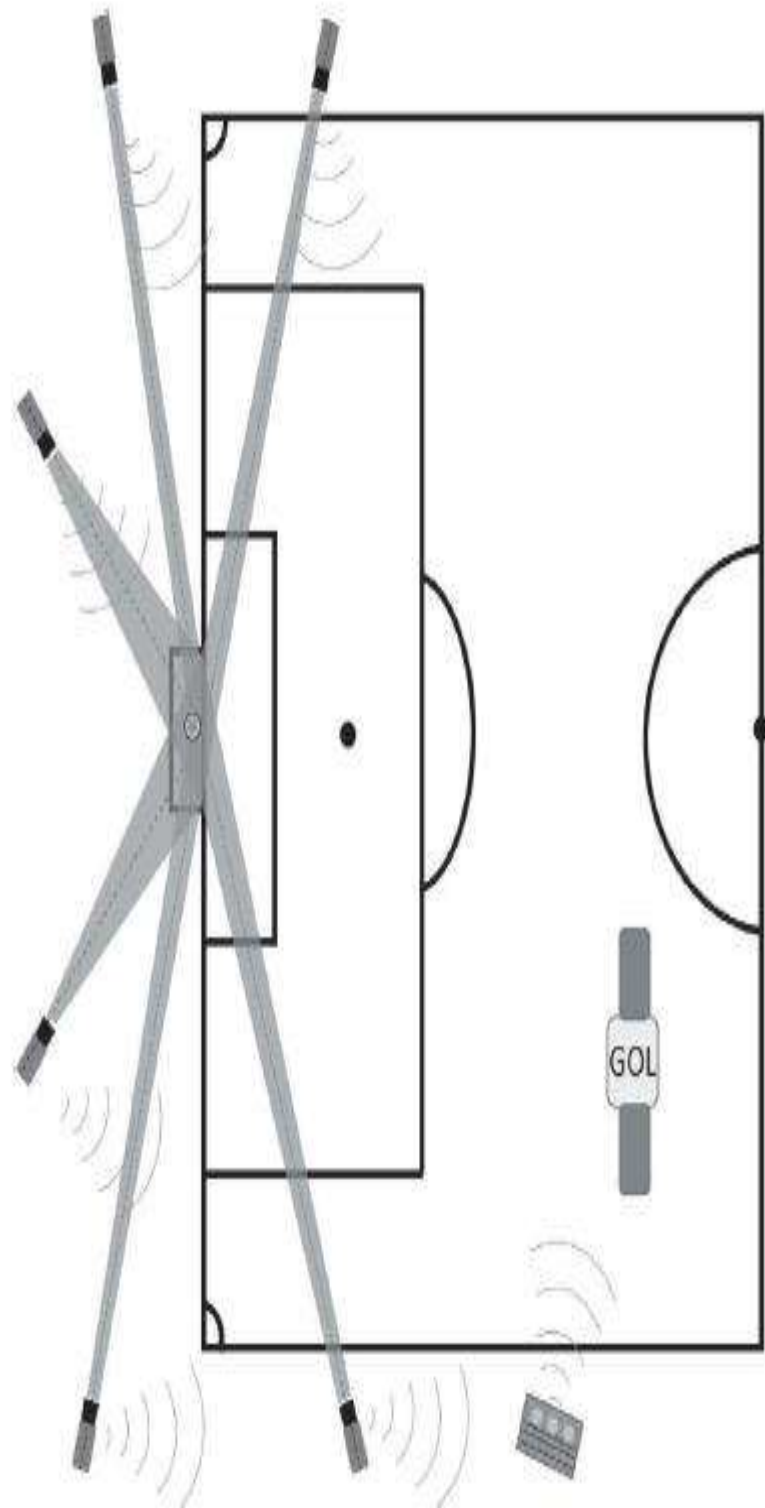
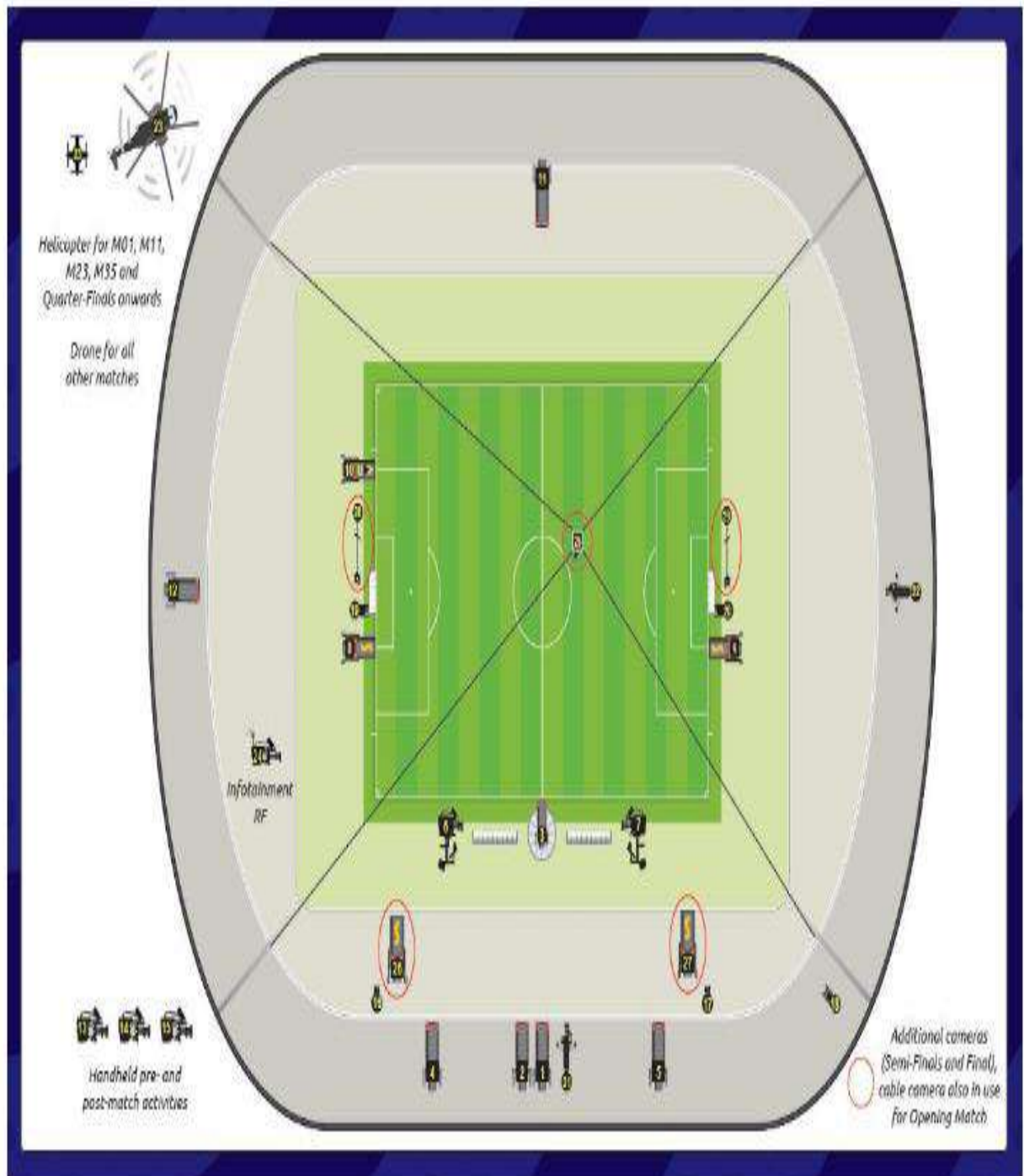


Figure 10.1 Distribution of cameras in Goal-Line Technology

THE CAMERAS

The VAR team has access to all relevant FIFA host broadcaster camera feeds as well as two additional offside cameras, with the exception of a few cameras that do not cover the game.



The VAR team use 33 different cameras during a single match including four ultra-slow motion, eight super slow-motion cameras and two cameras especially for offside. Only the VAR team only have access to these two cameras. The VAR team mostly use slow motion cameras to define the type of incident and the position. There are two additional ultra-slow motion cameras which will be installed during knockout fixtures. These will be located behind each goal. The VAR team also take advantage of FIFA host cameras, but there are few cameras which are not mainly used for the game itself, such as helicopter cameras (VAR, 2018 World Cup).

Communication problems between the on-field referees and the VAR

It is also important that referees avoid any mistakes during the communication process. Particular regulations must be followed by referees:

- 1) VAR and the head of the referees mostly communicate about the situations. Other members can intervene in a conversation if either VAR or the head of the referees faces a technical issue.
- 2) Referees must use terms that are clear for everyone, and that should be based on the Laws of the Game.
- 3) Noone should intervene in a conversation between on-field officials, and when VAR or AVAR want to communicate with those officials, they have to press and hold a button to send a message.
- 4) VAR or AVAR make sure that on-field officials admit the message properly, and thus if referees do not receive the message due to technical issues, it is better to repeat the message once again.

Until the VAR system was implemented, the football world and football lovers suffered due to the unfairness of decisions made by referees, and they grew tired of it. After several discussions, IFAB confirmed to use of a new technology, the VAR system in football in 2016. The goal of the VAR system is to support referees in avoiding mistakes, in other words, to give them a second chance to make better decisions. Referees will definitely enjoy having such an effective technology. It

creates an extra job for referees, and it should not be criticized, it is a tool that enables to referee's work smoothly as possible (Armenteros, 2020).

CHAPTER III

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

Football refereeing is a responsible and interesting job. A referee has the authority to make decisions and complies with all international standards which give them the right to be the only official on the pitch. Hard work, a good knowledge of the Laws of the Game and good management skills are required to become a football referee. A referee usually has two assistant referees on the pitch, which are also called linesman. Their duties involve assisting the head of the referees in certain cases, and to controlling the offside based on learned knowledge. Only the head of the referees makes final decisions during the match; assistant referees do not have the right to affect the final decisions. In most football matches, there is also a fourth official who is mainly responsible for controlling team coaches, players and other officials in the technical areas. They also deal with administrative tasks for the head of the referees and to ensure the procedure is correctly implemented. Certain levels which are required by national or international football associations must be passed in order to become a referee. There are four main requirements for becoming a referee: good knowledge of the Laws of the Game, which were written by FIFA; being in good physical shape, which is also essential as others; self-confidence, in other words, referees must not be afraid of any team, coach, spectator and so on, as only referees are able to make decisions; last but not least, referees have to be good at management during the match, because they not only have to manage the game itself but also thousands of spectators, team officials and so on. The overall situation in Azerbaijan will be discussed in detail in this thesis. Real facts and examples with regard to refereeing in Azerbaijan will make situation clear.

3.1. General requirements of refereeing in professional football

The UEFA Referee Convention (Edition 2012) basically defines the aims, terms, rights and duties of referees. The purposes of the convention are to improve the status

and quality of match official by applying certain tools, to make sure that referees receive a high level of education, and to set up a centralized organization with the UEFA member association in order to prevent control by other bodies. The convention includes: *Refereeing Structure and Organization, Education and Development and Financial Support*, and the Education and Development tool will be specifically emphasized in this paper. UEFA provides good services in terms of sharing experiences and showing best practice in education and the development of refereeing. The following program is divided into several phases: *The Instructors Education Program, Referee Recruitment Program, Grassroots Referee Education Program, Talents and Mentors programs, Elite Referee Education Program and Referee Observer Education Program.*

The first step in the Instructor Education Program, is for all referee instructors to complete an introductory course which is held at least once per year. During the introductory course, referee instructors will acquire communication and facilitation skills, modern methodology, teaching aids, and so on. The introductory course aims to give the latest information from the Referee Assistant Program (RAP), any updates or changes to the Laws of the Game, and any guidance, equipment or materials from national associations. The goal of the program is to increase the number of highly qualified referees and assistant referees in order to meet today's demand. Grassroots referee education is just as important as other programs, which basically includes an introductory course at least 15 hours includes theoretical and practical points on the Laws of the Game and after the introductory course is over, the referees have to take a written and fitness test. Seminars will cover topics including particular incidents from previous matches, and interpretations of the Laws of the Game. Fitness tests will be based on the national grading system.

Talent and mentors programs create an opportunity for selected referees and assistant referees to gain special education and training. The program lasts two years, and involves practical and theoretical seminars, face to face conversations and guidance from mentors. Referees or assistant referees should be in this program for a maximum of two years and during this time they have to participate actively in all

seminars, follow certain fitness programs and attain at least a basic level of oral and written English at national level. Of course, mentors play a key role in this and they should be former match officials who have good experience and are keen to teach, to be a positive communicator, to create a friendly atmosphere and so on.

The Education and Development tool includes Elite Referee Education Program. The topics of the seminars are similar to those of the previous programs, and the referees gain support in terms of media training, medical check-ups, mental preparation, psychological support and related tools. Seminars are held once every two months and there are FIFA tests. There are also two organized seminars each year that involve referee observers. Lastly, the Referee Observer Education Program involves with seminars which are held annually and cover topics such as report writing, feedback and evaluation methods, management skills, and so on. Referee observers must attend the joint seminars with elite referees twice per year. Importantly, refereeing in Azerbaijan complies with UEFA standards and is controlled by the Referee Committee of AFFA (Stuchlik, 2020).

3.2. Refereeing in Azerbaijan

Currently, Active match officials are divided into various categories in Azerbaijan. The Referee Committee of AFFA notes that these different categories include elite, first, second, third, fourth and beginner referees, also futsal and female categories. The current number of active match officials at national level is given below:

Elite Category – 11 Referees and 15 Assistant Referees (ARs)

First Category – 6 Referees and 12 ARs

Second Category – 12 Referees and 17 ARs

Third Category – 24 Referees and 53 ARs

Fourth Category – 27 Referees

Current beginner – 30 Referees

Futsal – 23

Female – 16, included in the above categories

At the international level, Azerbaijan are represented by one referee in Category 1 and two referees in Category 3 (Stuchlik, 2020).

The Referees Committee of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) aims to spread knowledge of refereeing not only to referees from Baku, but also in the other regions of Azerbaijan. The Referees Committee thus held a seminar with the help of committee member Anar Salmanov and current international degree Referee Orkhan Mammadov in Nakhchivan city in order to discuss football rules and the overall situation of refereeing in Azerbaijan. The seminar lasted for two days on 28-29 February. During the seminar, the local referees interpreted the amended rules in the Laws of the Game, and are explained several disputed moments from previous matches via video clips. A Referee Committee always tries its best to focus on refereeing in regions, involves all referees and unifies them under one flag (AFFA, 2020).

Referees group training and seminars have been canceled due to Covid-19 outbreak, and therefore AFFA, with the help of UEFA, started to deliver online classes to referees from the Azerbaijan Premier League. The Head of the Referee Committee, Fritz Stuchlik, organizes online classes once a week to two separate groups of referees with participation from a member of the UEFA Referee Committee, Kiros Vasaras. The online classes aim to discuss and analyze video clips of previous international matches and experts offer their recommendations in interpreting the Laws of the Game and their implementation on the field of play (AFFA,2020).

According to a list of FIFA referees, three referees, six assistant referees, one referee from futsal, two referees from beach soccer, one women referee and one assistant women referee represent Azerbaijan in the international arena (AFFA, 2020).

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

4.1. Expert interviews

In this thesis, I intend to review and compare the existing principles and standards in refereeing education and training both in Azerbaijan and internationally. The idea is to investigate whether and how these principles and standards generally differ and whether and to what degree they are in line with theoretical implications from scientific studies that were found to reduce (intentional and unintentional) mistakes in decision making. The study will include desk research of documents on refereeing education and training from the official websites of football federations, UEFA and FIFA as well as scientific articles, reports and available statistics, and expert interviews will be conducted. It was planned to involve experts from both Azerbaijan State Academy of Physical Education and Sport (ASAPES) and the Referee's Department of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA). Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the number of experts has been reduced and only the referee's department has been involved in interviews. The international expert who is the head of the Referee Committee in Azerbaijan will be involved, among others.

4.2. Expert Selection

As stated in the methodology section, experts will be mainly chosen from the Referee's Department of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA). Two interviews were held:

Expert 1, Fritz Stuchlik- Head of Referee Committee of the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA)

Expert 2, Current Referee in Azerbaijan Premier League

4.3. Analyzing qualitative data

An interview was held with Fritz Stuchlik who is the head of the Referee Committee at AFFA head office, on 6th February. The duration of the interview was 45 minutes and audio recording was used. The interview with Elchin Masiyev, who is currently the referee for the Azerbaijan Premier League was held online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It lasted 40 minutes, and the audio recording was used. I asked six questions about refereeing in Azerbaijan, its requirements, education in Azerbaijan and the potential path for referees from Azerbaijan to the international level. Two interviews were held with field experts for the qualitative study. The questions and responses are indicated in the Appendix.

RESULTS

The implications of referee bias and favoritism

Carlos Lago-Penas and Maite Gomez-Lopez described an inverted U-shaped relationship between extra time and scores; in other words, the decisions of referees are one-sided and biased to big teams according to the ranking table. When a big team is winning a game, referees try their best to finish the game as soon as possible. Conversely, if a big team is losing, they attempt to prolong the game as much as possible. The result is thus determined by the amount of additional time decided by referee. Obviously, if there is a big difference in scores, referees will add less extra time to the game. Secondly, favoritism towards stronger teams plays an essential role and directly impact on the final result of the game. Referees are not influenced in these situations (Peñas & Lopez, 2016).

The effect of the VAR system

Based on a number of studies which conducted in a social science area includes to enhance the performance of the football referees including non-biased decisions of referees, improve management skills and the integration of technologies to football and the referees' adaption as well. On the other hand, some studies show that there is significant criticism towards new Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology system in football. The first argument that critics make about the VAR system is about the flow of the game. There will be many controversial episodes during a game and if the VAR system is consulted in each and every episode, this will cause many stoppages and affect the joy of the fans receive from the game. Those people who are against the VAR system also say that errors and mistakes are an indispensable part of a football game; in other words, they keep the football game fun and interesting. Imagine a situation where fans are celebrating a goal after several minutes have passed, and due to the pressure from the other fans and rival team means that the referee consults with VAR which results in no goal decision due to an offside that

can barely be seen by human eyes. Technology is also still used by a human being, and is thus open to interpretation. (Armenteros, 2020, p.4).

According to our study, the VAR system offers advantages to football in general. It has a huge impact in decreasing the number of fouls and offsides, and at the same time increasing the number of minutes added to the regular time by the head referee.

In summary, the evidence from CL games has provided a promising result- less bias in referee decisions- but they are not immune to social pressures. A salary package negotiation would encourage referees to make decisions without biases, but the human factor will always allow influence. New policies and technologies have been implemented to combat referee favoritism, but that has sparked a negative public opinion, suggesting that the decisions are made by robots and other technologies, and that watching the game is not as fun as it used to be before. For instance, the introduction of Video Assistant Referee (VAR), means that matches are paused whenever team is suspicious about an incident. The referee then comes and checks the position, and this may sometimes result in a goal not being counted, or a decision for a second penalty, which fans do not find attractive. It is noteworthy that referee bias has drastically declined over time and which a promising trend (Buraimo, 2011, p.341).

The situation in Azerbaijan

According to the interviews, refereeing is an enjoyable and at the same time responsible job in football. A person has to pass several steps to become a professional football referee and demonstrate the initiative to overcome the challenges that will definitely face a professional referee. As Fritz Stuchlik and Elchin Masiyev (2020) said, referees always have to be in good shape and at the same time have good knowledge of the Laws of the Game. According to the experts, they noted that biased decisions are accepted normally because each referee watches football and supports a club or player especially European football. However, a referee's job is to be neutral and to make fair decisions. No cases of referee bias or favoritism were

found in Azerbaijan. Football is very popular, and fans, including referees, have idols in the European leagues. A professional referee has to be fair, however, and to take in a neutral position. Referees should not damage their career by making a biased decision or favoring any team during a match. VAR technology is a supportive tool for both referees and the football world. VAR aims to minimize mistakes and ensures that everything is within the framework of justice. VAR is not implemented in Azerbaijan, however, due to the question of time and money. There are few Azerbaijani referees in the international arena mainly due to low League performance. As interviewees noted, unfortunately Azerbaijani referees do not have experience of large numbers of spectators and the level of difficulty of the game compared to the top five leagues. UEFA thus mostly appoint referees from the European leagues who have vast experience in front of more than 50,000 spectators and big clubs. Referees must train hard to be in good shape and to achieve good performance. Language skills are also vital for becoming a top-class referee. Of course, it would not be easy for Azerbaijani referees, but hard training and great effort would always pay off.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In summary, a referee is a significant person who has the power to manage players or athletes, and to make fair decisions based on the rules of sports during tournaments. This study shows that referees are a major part of games, and without them no competition can be successful. Especially in football, referees must follow specific guidance and requirements in order to become professional. Referees have to gain several skills and attributes in order to have an opportunity to manage games and be in competition with other referees, such as a good knowledge of the Laws of the Game and its interpretation in matches, being in good physical shape, having self-confidence and finally management and language skills. Refereeing aims to take in a neutral position and each player must respect rules, although some studies show that referees sometimes abuse their position in order to make biased decisions or favor a club. This is not allowed in the football world, however, and we such referees are banned from football for their lifetime. Studies clearly show the reaction of football fans to referee bias and favoritism, and it can also be seen in the statistics and tables. VAR technology is considered the right hand of referees, and the main goal of VAR is to avoid mistakes to create as fair an atmosphere as possible. Of course, the VAR system was criticized after implementation in Italian Serie A and the deal in terms of administration and exam structure, and also created seminars and training with UEFA standards. The Referee Committee regularly visit regions in order to organize seminars, discuss video-analysis and describe new changes to the Laws of the Game. Azerbaijani referees confront obstacles to regularly represent the country in the international arena. These challenges are firstly linked with league performance. The Azerbaijan Premier League does not include the big teams and massive numbers of spectators, and the difficulty level of a single game cannot be compared with European leagues. In order to enhance league performance, it would help to see more clubs in the Azerbaijan Premier League, and especially clubs from regions that will eventually involve more spectators in stadiums. Referees can also develop themselves by attending summer and winter camps in Turkey or the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

in order to gain opportunities to manage matches for international clubs. They will definitely enhance their performance by both gaining international experience and personal skills. The VAR system is not implemented in Azerbaijan football, however, and it would be a great initiative to set certain number of digital cameras properly to provide the opportunity for referee observers to evaluate referee performance, to show whether referees see the incidents or miss some of them. Referees from Azerbaijan also have difficulties in language skills, and it is totally different from other countries in terms of the approach to refereeing. Most Azerbaijani referees only want to be promoted to the Azerbaijan Premier League, because English language is considered a huge barrier. Most of them are not well-educated, have graduated only from high school, and see a referee job as the first job in their career. These people mainly come to refereeing out of necessity, which is different to the experience in Europe. To my mind, if a person wants to become a professional referee, they should first love and always be enthusiastic about the job. It will also be helpful if the Referee Committee takes an exam on the world outlook and the English language in advance, and that separate language courses for learning particular terms in refereeing could be organized for those who cannot pass the test or find it difficult to learn English. Referees are always at the center of attention from fans and the football community, a referee is representative of their country, therefore they have to demonstrate all characteristics at the highest level.

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Appendix 1

Question 1 – What are general requirements for becoming a top-class referee at an international level?

From my point of view, there is no difference in countries which does not matter if you come from Azerbaijan or from a big European football country like Spain or Germany. The most important thing, of course, is a good performance. This is always number one. Second is physical shape, knowledge about the Laws of the Games means theoretical knowledge, but also the possibility to have good application during the game. Of course, you have to have a good personality which is also necessary. You don't have to be afraid about decision making because this is part of referee participation. Furthermore, active participation both on trainings and seminars plays an essential role in refereeing as well. Finally, for sure, in any case of the international referee, the level of English must be very good.

Question 2 – Have you heard about any referee bias or favoritism behavior towards club, coaches or any fan group in Azerbaijan or any other country of the world before?

To my mind, every referee was a child before and if you are a child of course, depending on the interest of your family, you start to become interested in football or not. And if you become interested in football because your father, brother, neighbor, whatever is somebody who is interested in one player in one club or whatever, and because of this as a child, you grow up with this mentality. And maybe you like some player you like some club, more or less. This is, I think, international teams or international players, because they are on TV. They're very famous, like David Beckham in past or Ronaldo in past of where the big number of examples, but later on if you become a referee for sure you lost this interest, first of all, because maybe the player doesn't play any longer Like Beckham, or maybe because you have now focused to new duties, so you don't have time to follow this team. If you want to watch the team on TV, okay, it's fine and maybe you are happy if they will win. But

I think this is just the normal procedure of everybody who is involved in football, that he likes football in general and maybe some people who are involved in football, they have some favorite teams. This is a normal procedure.

Of course, I observe such things in Azerbaijan which is normal for every country. Azerbaijan is not special and different from other countries. Our referees are interested in both international teams and players as well. Hence, it will not be a big problem for them. In case if a referee starts to officiate on the international level, then immediately he or she has to be neutral. Because, the main task of the referee to make as less mistakes as possible and to manage games fairly. It would not make any sense, if the referee has an interest in one club and want the club to get a high position by making mistakes.

Question 3 – What do you think about the VAR system? Does it influence refereeing behavior and does it require further modifying the training of referees?

Of course, Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system is a very helpful tool for referees. There are some areas that the VAR system should intervene. As we know, the referee is the one and only decision- maker on the field of play. On the other hand, everyone else spectators who watch games from the stadium or in front of the TV, they can easily identify that was a major mistake which leads to a big impact on the outcome of the game. Therefore, with the help of the VAR system, referees have got a second chance to check a situation again in a very, very clear moment of an obvious mistake. VAR system is not used for making a better decision, however, only to get an opportunity if that is an obvious mistake. It is totally different to watch a game on TV than work as a VAR referee and VAR assistant referee. They have different tasks which are not easy to catch the moment and check whether it is an obvious mistake or not.

Question 4 – Have you changed something (at administrative and or practical levels) during your work as a head of Referee Committee in Azerbaijan in order to prepare referees here for achieving an international level?

A lot of changes made by side, that is a reason I was asked to come to Azerbaijan. First of all, we started to prepare referees with physical education, which means referees have to attend three weekly training sessions. We also implemented sport motoric tests which are done by the same company who is working with UEFA as well. In terms of theoretical education, we are doing a weekly seminar in the regards of analyzing the last match and to prepare for the next match. By analyzing the match, maybe we can avoid the same mistakes for the next time. Furthermore, I changed the observing system from handwritten reports to electronic reports. We divided referees into some categories which not everyone can officiate every game. The major change is to give education to all the referees in each part of the country. With my referee colleagues are going to regions for example Nakhchivan which was not done before. These are some of the main reasons we already changed in refereeing in Azerbaijan. Additionally, you can see a young generation who can easily adapt to new changes in refereeing and it would be also that they are not so affected by the old system.

Question 5 – From your point of view, what are the main reasons why referees from Azerbaijan are not regularly amongst the top international referees?

Regarding with the reasons that why referees from Azerbaijan are not regularly amongst top international referees. Fritz mentioned that If we compare football in Azerbaijan with TOP five leagues which are England, Spain, Germany, Italy, and France, of course, there is a big difference. Personally, if I am a responsible person who makes a decision in terms of appointment in Champions League competition, of course, I am going to choose referee from Spain who did El Classico last weekend, or from Germany who did Bayern- Borussia Dortmund game rather than the one from Azerbaijan who was the referee in single Premier League game. In order to decide

who will be appointed, it is easier because if there is a big game in front of 70,000 spectators, undoubtedly referees within the great background in terms of having experience on both the number of spectators and the level of difficulty of the game. However, it does not mean that referees from small countries have no chance because UEFA officiates the road very clearly such as Aleksei Kulbakov from Belarus, Damir Skomina from Slovenia. These are countries are considered as big football countries. Therefore, in any case, the referee has to be in a very good performance and shape as well. He has to manage a lot of good games on UEFA level before they will give him a high profile game.

Responses with regard to the mentioned reasons which may prevent referees from Azerbaijan to go to the international level. From Fritz's point of view, the English level would not be a big problem because referees who are on the international list are able to communicate easily in English. On the other hand, if the league is strong, this definitely will be helpful for referees to be recognized by UEFA Referee Committee. Currently, Azerbaijani referee Aliyar Aghayev who already manages in different competitions of UEFA that he has all the skills. He is in the first category list and needs him one step in order to be in the Elite category. The Elite category of UEFA consists of 28 referees and UEFA has 55 member countries. In other words, some of these member countries have two or even three referees who are inside the Elite category. Just imagine that this reduces of the possibility for other ones to be inside, hence if you are not better than the ones who are inside the Elite category, there is no possibility of exchange. Furthermore, if someone retires from the Elite category, they will bring the one who has to be stronger than other colleagues who are in concurrence with him. As a result, it is so easy to say, but very difficult to reach the level of the Elite category.

Appendix 2

Question 1 – When and how did you become a professional referee? How was the procedure?

I started to become a referee in 2016, but before I was a professional football player and I played in the National Premier League, U-15, U-16, and U-17 Azerbaijan national football team. Unfortunately, I stopped my football career due to the knee's injury during the final game of tournament among universities. Approximately two years later, I decided to become refereeing especially with the help and motivation of former referee Anar Salmanov. He suggested me to come to refereeing from point of view of a having good background in football, good physical parameters and etc. Later on, I decided to join a special course at the Association of Football Federation of Azerbaijan in 2016.

Question 2 – What are general requirements for becoming a top-class referee at an international level?

According to the FIFA referee list, each country has own certain number of international referees. Mostly, TOP-countries have 10 international referees, while Azerbaijan has only 3 international referees. In order to become a top international referee, you have to take into account several steps on this road. The procedure is going to be measure by the following aspects such as good knowledge of the “Laws of the Game”, good physical features, management skills, implementation of laws in the field of play, and finally language skills as well. Subsequently, you have to referee the matches in Premier League at least one year and then your name could be given as a candidate to UEFA. Later on, you have to pass three categories of UEFA and then you become a referee of Elite category which means you have opportunities to refereeing the games of Champions League and Euro and World competitions.

Question 3 – Have you heard about any referee bias or favoritism behavior towards club, coaches or any fan group in Azerbaijan or any other country of the world before?

Regarding with bias decision and favoritism in refereeing, of course, it happened to me to have an idol player, club and national team as well. Fans in Azerbaijan mostly love foreign players, because it is more related to how football is popular in the country we live in. In spite of having good players in Azerbaijan, however, unfortunately, Azerbaijan is not so famous in this kind of sport. Thereby, I also watched European football and made my idol over there. On the other hand, I completely do not want to say that acting as favoritism to any players, clubs, fans or even coaches that will lead to influence on your management during the game if you approach your job as a professional. In other words, while you become an expert in any field that you are working for, factors such as favoritism will not let you destroy your career by doing such acts. Time to time, you pay more attention to your career and thus you will not have time to watch your favorite player or club at every match.

Question 4 – What do you think about the VAR system? Does it influence refereeing behavior and does it require further modifying the training of referees?

In fact, having Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system is considered as a good tool for referees in modern football. As we know, the speed of current football is highly developed which also leads referees to train a lot in terms of fitness in order to adapt the modern football. Of course, we should not mention that referees are able to miss the situation or not give fouls which leads to a big impact on the outcome of the game. Referees can not be as speedy as a ball or game itself. Therefore, I considered the VAR system as a good advantage for referees and in the meantime, we learn new things and terms. Referees always have to take into account that we should not think about the VAR system during the game. We have to focus on the match and show your skills in the field of play. If Therefore, with the help of VAR

system, referees have got a second chance to check a situation again in a very clear moment of an obvious mistake. VAR system is not used for making a better decision, however, only to get an opportunity if that is an obvious mistake. Of course, the procedure of VAR can be seen as an easy job, however, it is a long process with seminars and trainings during one year.

Question 5 – From your point of view, what are the main reasons why referees from Azerbaijan are not regularly amongst the top international referees?

First of all, if we want to compare Azerbaijan with top countries, you will definitely see big difference between them in terms of the national football league, the performance of clubs and even the number of spectators. Hence, UEFA will give appointments to the ones who already managed big games in Germany, England, Italy, and others instead of Azerbaijani referees. We really suffer from the mentioned reasons above. Referees from Europe managed big games in front of more than fifty thousand spectators each week will have more chances to be appointed to international games, while you can see maximum of one or two thousand spectators during a single Premier League game in Azerbaijan. It is obvious that the referee who has a great background in terms of having experience on both the number of spectators and the difficulty level of the game will definitely a few steps ahead. Although, UEFA does not forget about small countries and they have a lot of requirements comparing to top countries. For instance, referees from top countries are promoted to international referees, they start an international career from the second category at UEFA, whilst Azerbaijani referees start from the third category which means that small countries have to work a lot and meet all requirements. As an example, Aliyar Aghayev referee from Azerbaijan is at first category list at UEFA which is a great achievement for Azerbaijan's football. Additionally, Fritz Stuchlik who is a new Head of Referee Committee in Azerbaijan applies new standards and modifications which all comply with UEFA requirements. Hopefully, I expect not

only Aliyar Aghayev but more referees from Azerbaijan to go to the international arena and manage games at international level in the near future.