

A Third Card!

This was a few years ago. I was sitting with a few friends watching Monday Night Football. During one of the 15,000 television commercials in the first quarter, my friend began TV surfing and hit on the Fox Soccer Channel and Man U was taking on Chelsea.

"Hey, Tommy D, here's your game!" came the cheer from the friends, all of whom, I should note, knew as much about soccer as I do about designing a Volkswagen to land on Mars and send back pictures to my laptop.

We stayed on the soccer game for a few minutes when it happened. The thing that will forever keep soccer from entering the mainstream sports world in the good ol' USA.

Cristiano Ronaldo was dribbling with his usual flair -- feet flailing all over the place, the ball seemingly glued to his boots. He gets into the box and POW! Down he goes, now his arms flailing all over the place, the ball now glued to the feet of Chelsea's John Terry who clears it away. The TV camera, of course, stayed with Ronaldo who -- and I am not kidding -- did three complete body rolls after hitting the ground and then -- and I am not kidding -- grabbed his shin.

"Don't they wear shin guards?" asked one of my buddies.

"Um, yeah!" I replied.

"But he didn't even get kicked in the shins," said another.

"Um, no!" I replied.

"Then what the heck is he complaining about?" asked another.

Before I could answer, the replay came up and sure enough, Ronaldo was barely touched but he decided since he was no doubt going to lose the ball he might as well make it look like he got fouled.

"Holy cow, he didn't even get touched," said one friend.

"He was rolling over like he was getting shot with a machine gun," said another.

"Do they allow crap like that?" asked another.

I was getting bombarded by questions and comments, and I could not defend my beloved sport.

"Well, refs do have the right to card Ronaldo for what they call diving," I began to explain.

"Diving? He deserves an Academy Award for that performance," said one friend.

This, of course, is not to pick on Ronaldo who is indeed a world-class player. But the point of this is that diving is all too frequent in the men's game. And is starting to infiltrate the women's game (see any Brazilian match). Thankfully, none of our women get into the diving scene.

Abby Wambach, perhaps the most fouled soccer player on earth, gets knocked to the ground as often as Ronaldo and more violently at times, yet she gets right back up. Ronaldo and his ilk, stay on the ground, and hold various body parts, until the ref makes his call.

No doubt, calling a dive on a player is subjective and most referees prefer not to do so because it is a cardable offense.

What to do, then?

Add a third card. Along with the Yellow (caution) Card and the Red (see you later) Card, refs working men's games should now carry a Pink (you're a frickin' sissy) Card. On one side of the card, in big letters, would be the phrase, "The Academy Called. You're Up For Best Actress in a Supporting Role". On the other side is, "Abby Wambach Always Gets Right Back Up. So did Mia Hamm!"

This way, the ref can use his judgment as to how silly the dive was. Any player who accumulates 5 Pink Cards would then have to put on a Cheerleader Uniform and perform Barry Manilow tunes at halftime of an away match.

But seriously folks...

Diving in the men's game really needs to be addressed. I recently watched a college game on television and a high school game in person and saw players diving at the first hint of a foul inside the box. Now, obviously, players are taught to embellish a foul inside the box. I certainly was. And frequently players are viciously tackled in the box.

But players need to stop the body rolls when hitting the ground. And need to stop grabbing their shins. It looks ridiculous.

AND ONE MORE OPINION....

Can we have Golden Goal in all overtimes from here on? There is so much excitement in an overtime period when knowing that the first goal in wins!

OK, ONE MORE OPINION....

And how about at the youth and high school level, when a game remains tied after overtimes, instead of Penalty Kicks we go to the old North American Soccer League shootout format, where the attacking players start from 35 yards away and the defending goalkeeper is allowed to come off his or her line. Who can ever forget Carlos Alberto of the New York Cosmos flicking the ball up and juggling it on his way to the scoring the game-winning shootout goal!

SORRY, THIS IS THE LAST ONE...FOR NOW...

This is in regards to high school soccer in New Jersey -- No more 2-man referee games. Let's go with the regulation 3 ref system -- one center official with two assistant referees manning each sideline. With the current 2-man system, the offside call is often missed.