

INPLAY WINTER 2006

One Person Diagonal

by Jeff Stern, Section Six Director

In most AYSO regions the three-person Diagonal System of Control (DSC) is a luxury. It requires three certified referees and most regions just don't have enough referees to have this luxury. So, most games are covered by a single referee and possibly some club linespersons.

A few years ago, I read an article by Giovanni Piazza, former USSF National Referee and referee and national instructor with the Italian Federation, regarding how to referee a game without the help of qualified Assistant Referees. His method is based on what is taught in Italy plus the result of his 25 years of applying those teachings at all levels of play. We call the system the One Person Diagonal (OPD).

At first, I thought the system sounded nuts but one day I decided to try it out and was immediately converted. I asked him for permission to pass on his thoughts to AYSO referees and he agreed.

The following are positioning guidelines he suggests plus a couple of my own ideas. Key points to remember when using the OPD:

1. When the ball crosses the half way line, be on the same side of that half of the field (left or right) as the ball. If you find yourself on the wrong side, cut across. Anticipate and do everything you can to be on the correct side of the field.
2. Run downfield ahead of the ball, paying equal attention to the ball and the "offside line." Stay as wide as possible and get as deep into the attacking half as possible. How deep? If possession is being contested, stay closer to play than to the offside line. If the attacker is moving ahead with no problem, get closer to the offside line. In either case, width is the key. You are on the same side of the field as the ball, so as Piazza says, "Go wide, wider, and widest."
3. Establish an imaginary line 25-30 yards from the goal line as your reference point. If the ball goes straight downfield, go with it. If the ball crosses over to the other side of the field before reaching your reference point, you go, too. Sprint toward the opposite corner flag and don't stop until you've gotten wide and close to the offside line. Only execute one of these crossovers per attack or else your tongue will be hanging out. If the ball crosses back, let it go, but come in toward the center of the field in order to be closer to play.
4. Once the ball reaches your reference point do not cross over during active play. As in the situation above, pinch in toward the center of the field while maintaining the offside line.
5. On any throw-in or free kick, if you are not on the same side of the field as the ball, get over there if you possibly can. This is a key point.
6. Like real estate, the key with the OPD is "Location, location,

location." Stay wide and keeping moving forward.

7. On corner kicks, Piazza recommends the far post-at the intersection of the goal line and goal area line.

8. Don't waste time over-analyzing offside situations. If you think a player is offside, blow the whistle. In the OPD it's best to make the decision NOW. You have no neutral, qualified AR to help you or give you a late signal when something unusual happens. But if you are executing the OPD correctly, you will be amazed at how often you are in exactly the right spot to make a difficult offside call.

9. A real late-crossover may be necessary if the ball is deep in the attacking zone way over on the other side of the field. If the quality of play is not highly competitive (key point) and there is an opening, sprint across the top of the penalty area to get over to the other side.

There are a couple of other things to remember. First of all, in games where the skill level is low, there is much aimless kicking of the ball, and constant changes of possession in midfield, so the OPD might prove difficult. You could find yourself doing a lot of wind sprints by attempting to be on the proper side of the field and staying ahead of play. Adjust as needed.

Secondly, there are many times when a counter-intuitive or uncomfortable action is best. Point #6 above says to keep moving deep and wide. I found that in situations where previously I would have stopped and assessed the action, if I forced myself to move deeper and stay wide, I almost always found myself in a better position to call subsequent play.

I also discovered a worthwhile side effect of the OPD. In dull games and blow-outs, concentrating on your positioning helps to keep you in the game. It forces a level of concentration that is often lost in those games where your mind might wander.

The OPD cannot cover a game as well as the DSC. You simply cannot always be in the best position to see everything. However, if you follow the few simple rules above, you'll be able to do the best job possible. Try it, you'll like it!