Goal line technology in soccer

Technology

A global audience of 3. 2 billion people – about 46. 4% of the world population – watched the World Cup tournament of 2010, according to FIFA, the world governing body ofsoccer. The final between Spain and The Netherlands alone had an audience of approximately 530 million. There is little debate about which sport is more played and watched more than any other. It unites and divides cities and countries. It sparks debate and controversy, which is discussed within families, with co-workers, and even between heads of state.

At present, the most pressing issue facing the sport is whether to introduce goal linetechnology, computerized technology to definitely determine the scoring of a goal. This is not a new problem. According to the rules of the game, a goal should be awarded when the whole ball crosses the goal line. However, there have been many high profile cases when the officials have made the wrong decision and awarded a goal – or failed to award a goal. In such a low scoring game as soccer, where teams typically score one to twogoalsper game, it can mean the difference between winning and losing a game.

During an important tournament, it can mean winning or losing the biggest prize of them all: the World Cup. For example, in the 1966 World Cup final between a very closely matched England and West Germany sides, the game went into thirty minutes of extra time with the scores level after the normal ninety minute period. Then Alan Ball crossed the ball to England’s main striker, Geoff Hurst, who controlled and ball and shot towards the goal. The ball beat the German goalkeeper and crashed on the underside of the bar, sending it crashing down towards the goal line.

Tofik Bakhramov, the watching Russian linesman (actually a common misconception, as he was actually from the then Soviet state of Azerbaijan) indicated to the referee it was a goal, believing that the whole ball had crossed the white line. The goal was given and it changed the match. England went on to win the game and seal the country's greatest ever sporting triumph. However, based on the TV footage and photographs of the incident, the common unbiased conception is that it bounced on the line and therefore the goal should not have been awarded.

For years now the technology to judge whether the whole ball has crossed the goal line has existed. There are two well known systems: Sony's Hawk-Eye and the German alternative, GoalRef. Hawk-Eye is well known to cricket and tennis fans and has been used to great success in both sports, accurately showing where the ball landed in tennis, and predicting the flight of the ball in cricket. In soccer it could judge whether the ball crossed the goal line with a high level of accuracy. The second option – Goalref - places sensors inside the ball and goalposts, which categorically determine the exact location of the ball when near the goal.

So why hasn't the world's most populous sport embraced technology? Surely this technology would improve the game and make it fair for everyone? Well, it isn't as simple as it appears. In fact FIFA have found itself in a quagmire. If they introduce technology now at this late stage in 2012 they will be seen as being slow to react to important problems; resist technology and they will only exacerbate the problem in the future. The game's hierarchy has, until recently, been largely against the introduction of technology.

FIFA spends hundreds of millions of dollars worldwide investing in the game at grass roots level, determined to ensure football keeps its universal appeal by being played by all people on a level playing field. In short, FIFA wants a group of children playing onthe beachin Brazil to essentially be playing the same game as Barcelona versus Real Madrid in the Champions League Final. Moreover, the governing body fears the introduction of technology will lead to a ‘ slippery slope’ whereby technology will be used in many aspects of the game, drastically changing the flow of the game.

Michel Platini, head of the very influential European governing body UEFA, is one such example of the resistance of technology. Platini says, “ we will see. As for technology, I don't think it's good for football. Maybe goal line technology, but that would be the first step towards the introduction of technology in all areas of the game. I'm still very much against it and, to be honest, I'm not going to change my mind at the age of 57. ” Instead, Platini has implemented a new system whereby five referees are used instead of the standard three officials.

This, he argues, has eradicated the problem of ‘ ghost goals’ citing Marko Devic’s ‘ goal’ for Ukraine in the 2012 European Championships as being ‘ the only error’ in the last three years. Like most soccer fans, I love debating the game withfamily, friends and co-workers. I thrive on the controversy. When England midfielder Frank Lampard ‘ scored’ for England against Germany in the 2010 World Cup (the ball was clearly over the line but the spin of it made it bounce back out of the goal and the game played on) I was on my feet shouting at the referee for not giving the clear goal.

Equally, when the aforementioned Ukrainian striker Marko Devic’s shot clearly went over the goal line and neither the referee nor linemen saw it, I was smiling to myself thanking our good fortunate. In both cases it would have probably changed the match – and the tournament. After the match endless experts and pundits argued the issue. Essentially the controversy had inadvertently created an even greater spectacle. As much as I love the debates, I think it is now time to move forward. There is too muchmoneyinvolved and the reputation and credibility of the game is at stake.

I believeFIFA have an obligation andresponsibilityto introduce goal line technology – and the sooner the better. It should proceed with caution though. The ball crossing the line is definitive. In essence, the whole ball either completely crossed the white line or it didn’t. It isn’t open to interpretation like, say, whether a player has committed a foul. It is my belief that FIFA, while embracing this technology, should oppose further technological advances in the game, especially when it comes to subjective decisions. Football is a fast-paced game and breaks in the continuity would drastically change the game for the worse.

Goal line technology has been proven to work quickly and effectively ensuring it will have minimal negative effect. In conclusion, I acknowledge the problem of whether to introduce goal line technology is a divisive issue. I can see the argument from both sides. However, I do not agree with the current policy of stalling on the issue and delaying technological change or the over-complicated idea of bringing in more assistant referees, as

suggested by Michel Platini. Instead, it is my belief that it is time for FIFA to embrace change and bring goal line technology into the “ beautiful game. ”