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# Effective Officiating Practices for an International Masters 5-a-side World Cup Football Tournament

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**Introduction:** International masters small-sided football competition for 55-65+ players (e.g., 3v3, 4v4, 5v5, futsal, and competitive walking football) is not new in tournament settings around the world, however, very little is known about effective officiating practices in this context. Although FIFA, the world governing body for football, have well-established guidelines for community football (e.g., futsal, grassroots football development), currently there is not yet official FIFA guidelines (nor official customisation of rules) for small-sided football in order to meet the unique needs and circumstances for 55-65+ players at various levels of competition. In the absence of specific FIFA guidelines, international 55-65+ masters football tournament rules are typically determined by host clubs or local football organizations and implemented by qualified local referees with a knowledge of the Laws of the Game. Thus, “localized” masters small-sided football tournaments and officiating practices tend to implement rules which are familiar to local football cultures and traditions, and which are aligned with local football associations etc. Interestingly, some international masters tournaments are conducted in a similar way by simply adopting localized referees and respective rules. In contrast, “internationalized” masters small-sided football tournaments and officiating practices go far beyond localized implementation. Internationalized masters tournaments are also about the way in which the tournament is planned, implemented, evaluated, improved, and how tournament officials, teams, players and spectators (whom many have travelled across oceans, continents and countries with different masters football traditions practices) are supported within these processes. In an internationalized masters tournament context emphasis is placed on multicultural and intercultural perspectives; global trends in effective and sustainable

masters small-sided football practices; and, a wider process of transcending borders, focusing on interdependence, and lessening of the influence of localized football cultures. Thus, officiating in an internationalized masters tournament context is a complex and multifaceted process. We argue that officiating practices for an international 55-65+ masters small-sided football tournament is inherently situated within broader communities of practice (including FIFA and club/organizational cultural context and political landscape, strategic priorities, access to available resources); it is socially mediated (shaped by key tournament leaders and stakeholder support including engagement by peer referees, coaches, captains and players); and, it is locally and internationally constructed (i.e., conceptions of “quality and effectiveness” will always be part of how it is adapted, understood and continually improved within contextually-bound settings).

**International officiating: Action research and best practice :** As part of preparation for the annual *International Masters 5-a-side Football World Cup Tournaments* hosted in European and UK venues (e.g., Denmark 2020), action research methodology is employed over a 4-month period following each tournament in order to review, revise and improve effective officiating in an international masters small-sided football tournament context. Drawing on analyses of relevant data (including multinational tournament organizing committee planning and debrief sessions; interviews with individual referees, masters players, and team leaders; match video analysis, and Head referee post-tournament reports), this paper highlights key findings for effective officiating (including refereeing with customised rules) in an international 50-65+ masters small-sided (3v3, 4v4, 5v5 and competitive walking football) football context.



## Results

\* Effective officiating practices in international 50-65+ masters small-sided football tournaments should integrate unique local (e.g., traditions, environment, facilities, small-sided football culture), regional (e.g., national football association guidelines), and international (e.g., responsive to languages, multiculturalism, diverse masters small-sided football traditions, etc) participation needs and circumstances.

\* A multinational tournament organizing committee (including host club/organization leaders), an international tournament program, qualified multinational officials and customized 55-65+ small-sided football rules provide a critical foundation for both quality assurance and quality enhancement in an international 50-65+ masters small-sided football tournament context. For example, in the absence of specific FIFA rules for 55-65+ masters small-sided football (3v3, 4v4, 5v5 futsal and walking football), we argue that qualified multinational referees (including ESL consideration) with research-informed and customised 55-65+ small-sided football rules is critical for effective officiating in an international 55-65+ masters small-sided football tournament. The following international small-sided football rules for the *International Super Masters Tournament*

<http://faculty.educ.ubc.ca/hubball/worldcupMASTERS/tournament2020.html> were adapted from various small-sided football organizations around the world (e.g., *AMF & FIFA Masters/Seniors 5v5/Futsal, Star Sixes Football, "The Dutch Way: 4v4 SSG Method", 3v3 TSS Masters Canada, 3v3 Kick it USA, 3v3 Soccer UK, Walking Football Association England, European Legends Walking Football*) and without any advantage to any single club/nation/region or international masters team – these customised rules provide fairness and simplicity for all participating international teams (some without ESL), and equally important, for officiating multinational referees. Essentially, these customised international 55-65+ masters small-sided football rules focus around key tournament competition issues: players' age eligibility; customised dimensions of goalposts, pitches and game formats; players' safety, disciplinary sanctions; multiple substitutions, and team points scoring system.

\* Rules - Rules must be forwarded months in-advance for international team captains to distribute to their players (and translate as necessary) for question and answer sessions prior to the tournament. Team captains must ensure that their players arrive knowledgeable about the international tournament rules and small-sided games format. Rules should also be posted on the international tournament website (including rationale) and reinforced prior to tournament kick-off.

\* Multinational tournament officials' should be engaged in team briefings in-advance of/during and post-tournament games regarding officials' planning and reflection pertaining to tournament-specific format, rules, and game management issues. This engagement was key to refereeing quality, cohesion, and consistency throughout the international masters tournament experience. Further, effective referee and team captain communications played a key role for developing camaraderie and enjoyment, as well as to keep competition behaviors within acceptable limits and maintain the spirit of fair play for all international 55-65+ teams and players. Thus, officials are viewed as integral to the international masters tournament community. Many reunions, friendships, and better understandings about complex officiating experiences are formed as a result of this annual 2-day international masters event.

\* On-going research, development and dissemination (e.g., symposia poster displays) of evidence-based officiating are key to effective practice in this international masters small-sided football context. For example, referee performance quality (including fitness, positioning and game-management) aided tournament officiating credibility, decision making and match control. While walking Football was a new concept to some 65+ teams, and others who had played it had seen many variations to the rules applied (especially interpretations of non-running/fast walking!), feedback from the 2019 tournament, indicated that walking football players would benefit from a referees pre-kick off role-play demonstration about what would be allowed, and what would not be allowed regarding consistent interpretations (one foot on the ground at all times when) of fast walking versus running (on or off the ball). Furthermore, following the May 2020 tournament in Denmark, this issue will be evaluated, as well as, the 2-day sequencing order for 65+ games and subsequent modifications prior to the 2021 tournament in Brussels.

## Summary

Our research in an international 50-65+masters small-sided football tournament context suggests that a multinational tournament organising committee; an international tournament program; and, qualified multinational officials with customized rules provide a critical foundation for both quality assurance and quality enhancement. Further, effective officiating in this international context does not just happen organically, rather it evolves through strategic planning, facilitation and evaluation. Insights from this article will assist international masters tournament leaders and referees to enhance the quality of international 50-65+masters small-sided football tournaments.

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