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Better training, greater fitness helped referees make right decisions at Euro 2016

By AP | Jul 05, 2016, 09:50 AM IST

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No tantrums, no screaming and shouting, no condemnation by a TV jury. No calls for them to be sent home and fired from their jobs. What's gone wrong with referees at the European Championship?

Well, nothing. In fact, with just three games to play, everything's going right. The referees' performances in the 48 games played so far in [France](#) have received top marks. Pundits have been forced to describe the action rather than berating the man in the middle and his assistants. And there have been so many top performances by referees that [UEFA](#) will struggle to select the man to take charge of Sunday's final in [Paris](#) - a situation they'd prefer to the alternative of course.

Much of the credit for the improvement in standards has been given to Italian [Pierluigi Collina](#), now in charge of UEFA referees. He is better known for being the best referee of his generation, using charisma rather than yellow and red cards to control games, and has introduced a series of measures to help develop elite match officials. Refereeing experts also put the improvement down to a UEFA program to improve refereeing.

The European body is delighted that it has not had to defend referees from criticism. TV technology that has introduced dozens of cameras to games highlighting every mistake has rarely caught mistakes this time round.

Man management is often the most crucial aspect of a referee's performance. Referees have been noticeably calm and confident in France, without appearing arrogant or distant from players.

"The body language of the referees, often with an outstretched hand palm facing downwards, has remained calm and they have avoided conflict," said Keith Hackett, former head of [English Premier League](#) referees.

Referees have also shown fitness levels that are better than they ever have been. Players claiming a foul or a penalty are looking up to see the referee a few meters away and perfectly placed to rule on whether an offense has taken place.

'Dynamic sprinting' is the term used by modern referees. Before being approved for matches at the highest levels, referees have to be able to sprint as fast as most players. That ability does not happen overnight and has been part of their daily training for the past two years.

The number of yellow cards awarded in France has not changed much in comparison. Four years ago, four yellow cards per game were awarded. In France, the figure is 3.8 yellows. However, red cards are down sharply, from one every 10 games in 2012 to one every 16 games in 2016.

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