

After a hoard of controversial refereeing decisions in the 2010 football World Cup, the question on everyone's lips is "Does football need technology?"

For all of the debate surrounding technology, and the instantaneous justice it provides, a whole host of questionable decisions in the tournament has ensured that it remains a hot topic. Football purists don't want to see it as part of the game, but the vast majority of top-flight managers, players, and even the Prime Minister have weighed into the debate. In this article, we examine whether the introduction of technology could change the future of football.

Not least the disallowed goal by Frank Lampard in England's defeat against Germany, but a poor aside decision that gave

Argentina the advantage over Mexico in the first knockout round of the tournament, were the tip of the iceberg in an ever-increasing list of examples of poor officiating decisions in the 2010 World Cup. The group stages were littered with dubious sendings off, and Howard Webb's decision-making skills were called into question in the final. Did Spain's tournament-winning goal originate from a wrongly awarded goal-kick?

For most readers the biggest controversy of the World Cup came in the 38th minute of the crucial clash between old rivals, England and Germany. Frank Lampard's shot as goal hit the cross bar, bounced down over the line into the goal, and then back up onto the bar. The rebound trajectory of the ball saw it fly into the hands of the German goalkeeper. Whilst everyone with the luxury of a television replay could clearly see the validity of the goal, the Uruguayan linesman allowed the game to continue. At this crucial stage of the game, Lampard's goal would have seen England equalise, and the course of history could have been changed forever. Notwithstanding the fact that England's quality of play hasn't been up to scratch prior to Lampard's efforts, there is every possibility that psychologically, the equaliser may have been the catalyst behind a second-half resurgence.

Although many critics will label the technology debate as 'making excuses' for England's poor performance at the competition, the injustices afforded other teams too. Carlos Velez was awarded a goal against Mexico having scored in an obvious offside position. Despite vehement protests from the Mexican team, the officials, having consulted with one another, made the decision to allow the goal to stand.

The issues that perhaps make the situation all the more frustrating for spectators and fans alike, is the expectation that the referee must realise that a wrong decision has been made. So what are the obstacles to the introduction of technology, and why is football so far



England's goal for the next goal plan

behind other sports in embracing the inevitable?

FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), the world governing body, are notorious obstacles to the introduction of technology into the game. Historically, they have continually vetoed any plans to introduce the type of aids we now accept as integral parts of rugby, cricket and tennis. In March 2010, following presentations from Hawkeye (ball trajectory technology) and Cairns (intraoedip technology), ensuing discussions on the merits of using video replays led FIFA to announce the door was 'closed' on the technology in football debate.

FIFA's main argument is based around the assertion that the simplicity and universality of the game is instrumental in its appeal. However, they may need reminding that watching a match in the Conference South League is a far cry from spectating at a Champions League fixture. For a start, there are six officials for a Champions League fixture. Drawing the short straw for refereeing games in the lower leagues leads to a little more variability over numbers and qualifications of those in charge of games.

Additionally, FIFA propose that the introduction of any aspect of technology will hamper the dynamism of football, breaking it up and having an adverse effect on playing any advantages as part of the natural course of a match. However, there are many options available to counter-act unnecessary stoppages. If technology was employed, perhaps it could be monitored by a '5th official' who will advise the referee of any mistakes by exception. The game could then be stopped while the situation is appraised by exception.

FIFA have demonstrated their enduring support for the 'human' aspect of the game. They believe it is part of its appeal and fully accept that mistakes will be made by referees and line-women alike. Finally,

historically they have claimed that they could never condone the introduction of new developments that would lead to the removal of responsibility from referee. This is a particularly popular argument as FIFA continue to strive to improve the quality of officiating, and work to stamp out the contempt shown by the players towards the referee and linesmen (women). However, it remains to be seen whether the standards of officiating are improving or not. In fact, it could be argued that as the World Cup progressed, the standards and resulting consequences, deteriorated. Perhaps referees will become more credible if they are supported by technology.

Goal line technology is not the solution to every officiating problem in football, but it is perhaps the start. Further issues such as enforcing the offside rule, eradicating diving from the game and the accurate identification of serious fouls require equal consideration in order that football becomes a 'level playing field' for competitors.

Football has been accused of lagging behind other sports in embracing technology as a positive addition. The irony is that football is the most popular sport in the world, and one of the richest, with perhaps the most need for foolproof support for its already harassed officials. Who knows? Chance results with the disproportionate influence of human error and fans' incessant questioning of referees partnering may become a thing of the past. ■

Cate-Marie Roberts



Cate-Marie is a lecturer in sport psychology at the University of Birmingham and has previously represented teams competing in the FA Women's Premier League.