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VAR: A threat to Football's essence

4 years on from the introduction of VAR in the Premier League, is a slower, more delayed game really what fans want?

In the ever-evolving landscape of the beautiful game, it was inevitable that we would eventually face reality and deploy the Video Assistant Referee. However, we weren't guaranteed the luggage that came with it. Every week there's a seemingly contentious decision made by VAR, whether it be an unfortunate handball or a tight offside that is decided by inches. The tiny margins that football is boiled down to by VAR is not the identity of the sport, and it's the fans that are forced to suffer on a gamely basis.

The concept of there being a pitch side video assistant is to help referees in their judgement during a game. Extra cameras are set up to review 4 types of decisions: goals and any possible violations in them, straight red cards, penalties and mistaken identity when awarding a card. The issues arrive when the decisions happen long after the action happened, creating lengthy stoppages and hindering the flow of the game. VAR judgements come after views of the incident from every camera angle and showing the action in slow motion. These views deceive the referee by exaggerating every action.

The last time I checked, football wasn't played in slow motion. Everything is brought into slow speed with VAR, it distorts how the action actually happened. Every late challenge or flailing arm looks like violent assault. It makes all arm positions look unnatural and makes defenders seem completely incapable of playing the sport. So most of the time, the officials watch the action in half speed, and make an educated guess on what's going on.

This leads on to the inconsistency of the decisions they make. Nowadays I don't think anyone on planet earth can give a clear definition of the handball rule. VAR has created bewilderment amongst fans. Seemingly every week we debate whether a player's arm is in 'natural position' or if a player's right toe is onside.

VAR hinders the experience of match-going supporters, many scratch their heads while the officials discuss incidents. This happens while viewers at home are shown a feed of replays and updates. The video assistant threatens the traditionality of football and speaks volumes on how the sport has become reliant on broadcast revenues rather than ticket sales.

Although the vast majority of the time VAR has made the correct decisions, it's been overshadowed by the number of controversial calls. Just last week a Champions League VAR official stood down after a debatable handball decision in the last minute of PSG vs Newcastle. Simon Hooper is now not allowed to officiate Liverpool games after his blunder earlier this season, where he wrongly disallowed a Luis Diaz strike. The controversy is

heightened when the referees later admit that the decision they made was wrong. It's ironic that despite the referee now having eyes all over the pitch, the officiating has worsened.

Video Assistant Referees effects the spirit of the game in a negative way. Goals are constantly under scrutiny from the officials, ruining the emotional experience for fans. Every time a goal is scored, supporters are hesitant to celebrate because of the risk of it being disallowed. The smooth flow of the game is long gone for many fans, we wait for VAR to intervene instead of enjoying the emotions that come with football.

Supporters of the Video Assistant will say, "VAR makes the right decision more than it does the wrong one." But many fans prioritise a flowing game with less stoppages, to a fairer game that sucks the joy out of the sport. An online petition to get rid of VAR has over 30,000 signatures. If you were to search the word 'VAR' on any social media platform, you would see a stream of criticism from all sets of fans, even those who are favoured by the decisions.

VAR feels like a sacrifice, swapping fluidity and spontaneity for a joy-sucking, confusing, distorted version of the beautiful game. The raw emotion of football has been stripped to the bone. Whenever a goal is scored you get an eery feeling that VAR will steal the moment and hog the spotlight. It's put the game under a microscope, where we zoom in and slow down everything that happens. This isn't what football is; it has lost what once made the sport so flawless, its unpredictability. The world's sport has had its soul hijacked and it's not returning anytime soon.