

Will Video Assistant Referee (VAR) Be Extended to The Championship?

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In brief

VAR has not yet been extended to the Championship, but the EFL is expected to discuss it at their next general meeting with representatives from all 24 clubs.

One of the biggest talking points in football is whether VAR will be used in championship 2020/21, particularly in the Premier League, is the use of VAR (Video Assistant Referee), which was introduced in the top tier at the beginning of the season.

The addition of this technology, which assists the officials and ends 'clear and obvious' injustices, is one of the biggest changes to the game for decades. Opinions are divided on whether it is having a positive impact on the sport. We saw it used during the World Cup in 2018 in Russia and the leading organisations have made it clear that it is here to stay.

VAR recently had a big impact on one of the leading games in the Premier League when Chelsea hosted Liverpool at Stamford Bridge. With Liverpool leading 1-0, Chelsea thought they had scored a legitimate equalizer through Cesar Azpilicueta. The player and home crowd celebrated, and the two sides were preparing to kick the game off again when the referee revealed the goal had been reversed due to an offside incident in the build-up to the goal. Chelsea went on to lose that game 2-1 but if their goal had stood, it could have finished a different result.

Given how much money there now is in the Championship, especially the richest game in the world, the Championship play-off final at Wembley, where it is estimated that the winner of that tie earns around £170 million due to the financial windfall of making it into the Premier League, there is likely to be a demand to extend the use of the technology to ensure more correct decisions are being made at that level.

Leeds is currently top of the Championship table after a flying start to their 2019/2020 campaign. They are 11/10 in the Championship, betting to lift the trophy at the end of the season. The Yorkshire club is one of the biggest names in England, and if a decision does cost them the title or promotion at the business end of the campaign, they will feel aggrieved that VAR is not being used in their games.

The EFL is likely to discuss VAR at their next general meeting, where representatives from all 24 Championships clubs will give their opinion on the technology. If there is a desire for VAR to be used, they could have a vote, and it may be introduced as early as the 2020/2021 campaign.

One of the factors Championship clubs must consider with VAR is if they feel it is worth slowing down the game to accommodate. That has been not the only, but the biggest, criticism from football fans in the Premier League. We have seen similar technology used successfully in other sports, notably cricket, rugby league, and tennis. However, football is a very fast-paced game where long, no delays do nobody any favors.

Pressure will now be on referees in the Championship to get the big decisions right. Otherwise, the introduction of VAR will be inevitable in the second tier of English football and maybe even lower if the money is there to fund the technology further down the pyramid.

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