

Wisconsin's FIFA Referee Margaret Domka – ChinaTrip Blog

From: Margaret Domka

Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2011 9:06 AM

Hi everyone,

Just wanted you all to know that I have arrived at Chongqing. I missed my flight from Beijing due to delays in Chicago, but the airline had boarding passes ready for me for a different flight as soon as I arrived. And, thank goodness, when I arrived in Chongqing my ride was still waiting for me - albeit a bit panicked because they thought they lost me. I'm in the car now with an hour and a half ride to the hotel. It will be 12:30am Thursday morning when I arrive there. Hopefully I'll be able to fall asleep right away when I get there - it will be 10:30am your time - so we'll see how a mid-morning nap works for me.

Overall, though, the flight went very smoothly. The part of the trip I was most nervous about is now behind me (getting picked up), so now I'm looking forward to the tournament and my entire experience here in China.

I'm sure you'll all hear about it when I get back, but for now I just wanted to let you know that I've arrived (almost) safe and sound.

Have a great week!
Margaret

From: Margaret Domka

Date: Fri, 21 Jan 2011 03:39:07

Hello again everyone,

Today is the first day of games and I'm looking forward to getting started. I will be the referee on a 6:30pm match between China and Canada. I have to give my pre-game shortly and it will be a bit of an adventure with the language barrier. I am the only non-Chinese referee here, which is interesting. The group of Chinese referees is very polite, though. There is definitely a language barrier, but they are all really making an effort to speak English when I'm around them. It would certainly be much easier for them to carry on all of their conversations in Chinese. Our instructor/assessor is also Chinese, but working very hard to keep the instruction in English. I can tell that this is a bit challenging for all of them, but I really appreciate that they are all trying.

Surprisingly, I'm not feeling jet-lagged at the moment. Hopefully I continue to feel rested throughout the day so that I'm ready for tonight's game.

That's all for today's update...wish me luck on the game.

Hope you're all having a great day. Tomorrow will be good, too - I know because I'm already there!

Margaret

From: Margaret Domka

Sent: Friday, January 21, 2011 7:42 PM

Hi,

So last night's game ended up 2-3 with Canada winning in the last few moments of added time. I was happy with my game and felt my crew worked well together overall. One of my primary focuses throughout the game was to manage the time wasting. China scored early in the match and immediately started making efforts to waste time. I ended up with 2 cautions for delaying the restart, but felt I had a pretty good balance between managing the players by trying to talk them through getting the ball back in play and cautioning them. There were also 2 additional cautions against China for unsporting behavior. At the end of the first half the Canadian players were quite frustrated since they were down 2-0, but I was happy that they kept playing in the 2nd half and didn't get chippy. And it paid off for them in the end...

Today's schedule is much the same as it has been. Breakfast at 8:30, meeting at 10 (I'll find out then what the assessor's thoughts were from last night's game), lunch at noon, training session at the stadium at 3, dinner at 7. I'm hoping to get a chance to sight-see a little bit while I'm here, but as you can see our schedule is broken up throughout the day so it doesn't leave much time. I'll just have to wait and see...

So some of you are wondering what I've seen interesting so far. Like I said, I truly haven't been out much, but here are a few surprises: 1) it is not uncommon to see 3 or 4 people on scooter type motorcycles (with the last person holding on for dear life), 2) before you learn how to drive here you must learn how to honk - if someone or something is in your way, don't slow down, just honk and maybe swerve, 3) yogurt is not eaten with a spoon, but with a straw - now I know why they were all looking at me funny when they served us yogurt on the regional flight into Chongqing, 4) they will not allow me to carry my own referee bag to my room, it MUST be taken by a bellhop, 5) smog is very real - I've never experienced it like this before, a constant haze over the city, 6) heat is always turned off here when your not in a room, so it's always freezing when you first enter a place, and hot by the time you leave, 7) LOUD - between the honking and banging and construction noises, it is always very loud outside - in order to sleep I have to wear my noise-canceling headphones, 8) everyone here is shorter than me - shocking, I know, 9) pushing through crowds or to get off airplanes is perfectly acceptable, and finally 10) public restrooms, you expect me to do what? The toilet consists of a urinal in the middle of the floor in each stall - use your imagination.

That's all I've got for now.

Have a great day,

Margaret

From: Margaret Domka

Date: Sat, 22 Jan 2011 19:39:45

Hello again,

It is 3am Sunday morning and I can't sleep, so what better to do than send everyone an email.

Yesterday was a very enjoyable day for me. As you know, after breakfast we always have a meeting. During the meeting we discuss some of the laws and their applications and we receive feedback from the previous day's games. The assessor had a couple pointers for me - for example, not needing to move so close to my AR when the ball is her quadrant - but, overall she was quite pleased with my performance. She was very happy with the way I managed the time-wasting, which I was glad to hear because that was one of my biggest challenges during the game. The feedback session was very similar to what I experience in the US with the assessor asking each member of the crew for their thoughts on the game first and then adding her own advice and discussing how to improve as a group.

After the feedback session we were told we were invited to attend a lunch at a local restaurant for traditional food from this region. Up until this time our meals have all been served buffet style at the hotel restaurant - so this was a bit of an adventure.

We went to a "hot pot" restaurant. Everyone sits around a table that has an open-flame stove-top in the middle. A large pot of water with spices is placed over the flame to boil. Then a wide variety of raw meats, seafood, and vegetables are brought to the table. Each person puts what they want to eat in the hot pot and waits until it is has boiled long enough to be cooked (and to become spicy) before pulling it back out and eating it. We were served every kind of food imaginable - and some that I didn't want to imagine. Since I was the only non-Chinese person in the group they were all watching me closely to see what I ate and wanted me to try everything. I was a sport and gave everything a shot, but I stopped asking what things were after eating a cube of blood, some intestines, and an ox tongue. I didn't need to know anymore... Honestly, though, all of it did taste quite good. The textures and the thought of what animals and animal parts I was eating were not appealing - but if I just focused on the flavors, it was a delicious meal. I've attached a picture of some of my Chinese friends cooking their lunch in the hot pot.

After leaving the restaurant we were all very full, so we had an hour to rest before heading to the stadium for a training session. The training sessions involve fitness training along with practical/mental training drills for referees and assistant referees. We played a few games yesterday and worked a lot on eye contact and communication between the referee and AR while moving around different areas of the field. It was a fun session. There was a little accident during one of the games, though. On her signal the instructor wanted us all to race to pick up a ball that was in the center circle - but 3 of the referees collided and hit heads as they dove for the ball. They all ended up with lumps on their heads to prove it -- Oops!

After the training session we came back to the hotel to use the pool and sauna in order to get a very good stretch in before heading to dinner.

The most exciting part of yesterday is that I'm really starting to get to know the other referees better and we are beginning to gel as a group. Initially I was nervous about being the only English-speaking referee, but now that seems to be an advantage. Sometimes at tournaments the use of different languages ends up splitting the referees into different groups. But, here we are all forced to try to communicate with each other. This is definitely giving me a chance to get to know them better than I would have otherwise.

Today is another game day, so we will find out at our meeting what the assignments are. Since I was the center referee on Friday I would expect to be a 4th official or have the day off. Whatever the case may be, I'm looking forward to another day of soccer and learning from my experiences here.

Now it is time for me to try again to get some rest.

I hope you all have a great day!

Margaret

From: Margaret Domka

Date: Sun, 23 Jan 2011 03:22:10

Subject: Sunday #2

Hi,

We just finished our referee meeting for today and are now beginning our preparations for tonight's matches. During the meeting we watched some video clips from Friday's matches and talked about decisions and referee positioning. The DVD quality is very good and I was given a copy of my game, so I'm excited to watch the whole thing when I get a chance.

After some additional instruction on careless, reckless, excessive force decisions we were given our assignments for tonight.

I am pleased that I will be the center referee again for the 4:00 China vs. Sweden game. Sweden played a very quick game on Friday, so I would expect this game to be fast as well. Sweden beat the USA on Friday, so they are in good position to win the tournament with similar performances. Meanwhile, China will be playing with a lot of energy in front of their home crowd. It will be a fun game.

In an hour I will have lunch with my crew followed immediately by our pregame meeting. Shortly after that we will head to the stadium. The rest of the day will go very fast and I hope that everything goes as smoothly as it did on Friday.

Until tomorrow,
Margaret

From: Margaret Domka

Sent: Sunday, January 23, 2011 3:12 PM

Hello,

It is 4:30am Monday and I'm wide awake again.

Last night my game ended 2-1 in favor of China. Tomorrow is the last day of games here and it is bound to be very interesting because each team currently has one win and one loss. It is a round robin tournament, so whichever team ends with the best record will win.

I felt like there were several things I did well yesterday, and several other things that I would like to work on from the game. It wasn't a bad game for me, but there were definitely some things I could clean up.

I had one caution early in the game (8 min) against China for a blatant hold. I was happy with this decision even though it was so early because it helped set the tone. I felt my foul recognition was good and my wall management was stronger yesterday than it has been - I didn't feel as rushed as I often do. I took my time to get the players 10 yards from the free kicks and to get myself in an optimal position before restarting play. I was very happy about this change and hope it keeps improving.

Throughout the game I stayed near the play and did a good job of anticipating and being well-positioned during counter-attacks. However, I did struggle with my positioning in the middle of the field on a couple occasions. When the ball was in the middle third of the field, both Sweden and China's defensive lines were pushed forward. This compressed the area of play significantly and I had a hard time finding

positioning where I was ready for the next phase of play, but not taking up players' space. I will ask the assessor and look at the DVD for ideas.

There was one incident that occurred between China's goalkeeper and a Swedish attacker that I did not see. The goalkeeper gained possession of the ball and I turned my back too early to run up field. I believe the incident was contact between the two players that needed to be managed through admonishment, but I couldn't do that because I didn't see it. I will take a look at what happened on the DVD. But, the lesson is that I need to stay focused on the ball as I change direction to move up field.

One more thing I will look at is whether I should have cautioned China for delaying the restart. On one restart a Chinese player jumped in front of the ball just before a free kick was taken to slow it down. I gave a strong verbal warning, but I'm wondering whether a yellow card would have been more appropriate. A similar incident occurred again a short time later, and I was ready to caution the player, but there were substitutions, so I couldn't justify giving a caution for delaying the restart when the restart couldn't be taken until the substitutions were complete anyway.

I will be interested in finding out what the assessor's suggestions are from yesterday's match.

Today we will get to do some sight-seeing. Our fitness training session will be at 7am, which will be immediately followed by breakfast and our feedback session. We will then have the rest of the day free to explore the city of Yongchuan.

That's all for today, have a great one!
Margaret

From: Margaret Domka

Sent: Monday, January 24, 2011 3:32 PM

Hi everyone,

Yesterday there were no games at the tournament, but we still kept ourselves busy. We started our day by heading out to the stadium to take the FIFA fitness test at our 7am training session. There is a track surrounding the field and the CD with the test timing soundtrack was played through the stadium sound system. Everyone passed.

After returning to the hotel and having some breakfast we left for a day of sight-seeing. We took a bus up to Tea Mountain and Bamboo Hill. We had a tour guide (I didn't understand anything she said because she only spoke Chinese) that led us on a hike through an area with many tea bushes and then through a bamboo forest. We took a break in the middle of the hike for a lunch at a local family restaurant. The restaurant was actually right in the basement of a house on a traditional farm. We were served a wide variety of dishes again, similar to the hot pot meal, but all of today's dishes used bamboo shoots, pork, beef, and/or chicken as their main ingredients. The first thing I was served was a bowl of soup with a whole black chicken foot on the top. I ate the soup, but couldn't bring myself to eat the foot - so another referee gladly ate it. I've learned that restaurants here in general are not heated. Yesterday's restaurant was in the basement of the house, but there was no heat or insulation. Therefore, everyone keeps their winter coats on when eating.

After eating out we did a little exploring on the farm and found the following: live pigs, hens, and roosters, raw meat hanging in several locations, a meat curing room, a rutabaga field, and a cabbage field. It was all very interesting.

When we returned to the hotel a few of us visited a nearby supermarket, which I also found very interesting and took many pictures. There was an entire fresh meat refrigerator dedicated solely to chicken feet!

Since the tournament will be coming to a close before we know it, all of us spent some time in the evening downloading each other's pictures onto our computers - I have a lot of pictures I can share when I get home!

After a full day of sight-seeing we did not have a feedback session. We will talk about Sunday's games today before receiving the game assignments.

I will send another update after I find out whether I have an assignment today.

I hope you're all off to a good start this week,

Margaret

Sent: Monday, January 24, 2011 9:13 PM

Subject: Tuesday #2

It is 11am here and today's meeting and feedback session just ended. Overall, the assessor was pleased with my performance again on Sunday for the China vs. Sweden game. She was happy with the way I managed the players and felt I appeared confident and had strong presence on the field. The three things I included in my self-assessment in my previous email were also the three things she talked about in the evaluation. It is nice to know that my perception of the game is consistent with what players, coaches, and fans might be seeing. I did get the DVD that was produced by the Chinese television station, so I'll definitely be looking at how I can improve my future performances.

At the end of the meeting we also found out today's game assignments. I will be the fourth official for the China vs. USA match at 6:30pm. It is very unusual for a referee to see their own country's team at a tournament in order to avoid the perception of bias. However, since there are only referees here from China and the USA I have been assigned to this game along with 3 Chinese officials.

I will have lunch with my crew at 1pm, followed by additional game preparations. As I said yesterday, all of the teams are currently tied, so the crew will be preparing for a fast, physical, high-intensity game.

Until tomorrow,

Margaret

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Shortly after that we will head to the stadium. The rest of the day will go very fast and I hope that everything goes as smoothly as it did on Friday.

Until tomorrow,
Margaret

Date: Sun, 23 Jan 2011 21:12:29

Subject: Monday

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That's all for today, have a great one!
Margaret

Date: Mon, 24 Jan 2011 21:32:20

Subject: Tuesday

Hi everyone,

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Margaret

Date: Tue, 25 Jan 2011 03:12:40

Subject: Tuesday #2

It is 11 am here and today's meeting and feedback session just ended. Overall, the assessor was pleased with my performance again on Sunday for the China vs. Sweden game. She was happy with the way I managed the players and felt I appeared confident and had strong presence on the field. The three things I included in my self-assessment in my previous email were also the three things she talked about in the evaluation. It is nice to know that my perception of the game is consistent with what players, coaches, and fans might be seeing. I did get the DVD that was produced by the Chinese television station, so I'll definitely be looking at how I can improve my future performances.

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Until tomorrow,
Margaret

Date: Wed, 26 Jan 2011 02:28:01

Subject: Wednesday

It is Wednesday morning, which means my stay in China has come to a close and today I will travel home.

Last night's match resulted in a 2-0 win for the US over China. Canada won their match against Sweden as well. Therefore, the US and Canada ended with same record, but since the US beat Canada in head-to-head competition they won the tournament.

I was the fourth official on last night's match. As most of you know, this means I was not an active official on the field. Instead, the 4th official plays a very important role of checking in teams before the match, checking the match balls and other equipment that may be needed, managing the technical areas, assisting with referee responsibilities after injuries, informing the

referee of substitutions, keeping a record of the match, being the contact point between tournament administrators/stadium staff/TV red-hat and the referee, and serving as a back-up official if the referee would get injured. Basically, the 4th official takes care of any administrative work that needs to be done off the field so the referee and AR's can be focused on the game itself. While all of these responsibilities require concentration on the part of the fourth official, it is not a physically demanding position.

Although I did carry out all of my responsibilities, last night's match was uneventful for me. There were 9 substitutions, one caution, one injury, and absolutely no issues in the technical areas. Even though I did not have to manage a lot during the match, I still found the game to be a great learning experience. Since game administrative procedures can vary slightly in different countries and even from game to game, it is important that the fourth official has clear communication with all of the previously mentioned parties. Some examples of procedures that can vary are: what responsibilities the 4th official has during the pre-game roster and equipment check, where the pregame check will take place, what the walk out procedures will be, and how the 4th will communicate with the red-hat and others during the game. Most of this information is straight-forward and simply requires good pre-game communication to make sure everyone is on the same page. However, that communication is not so simple when there is a language barrier, or when there are assumptions that everyone already knows the procedures because they are "always" (in this location) the same. I have not had a lot of 4th officials outside of the US yet, so with each one I learn more about what to expect, what questions to ask, and how to communicate effectively even if there is a language barrier. For yesterday's match I relied heavily on my assistant referees to help me understand what was expected of me since they could translate. I asked many questions, but was glad I did because I was then comfortable that I was carrying out all of my responsibilities appropriately.

That concludes my updates from China. I am currently beginning the trip home and, provided there are no delays, will arrive in Milwaukee in 24 hours. I want to thank everyone for reading my messages and for all of the kind words and support I've received while I've been here. I hope to see many of you out on the field in the near future.

Before I go I will leave you with one last thought -- Does it defeat the purpose of shower sandals if they are left in the bathroom for public use? (This is common here.)

Have a fantastic day!
Margaret