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Via email

4 October 2023

Dear Debbie,

Use of VAR in the Premier League

I am writing in light of recent controversy around the use of video assistant referee (VAR) following the Tottenham vs Liverpool Premier League match on Saturday 30 September to highlight how statistics and statistical principles could help improve confidence in the VAR process and its implementation.

In particular, I am writing to propose collaboration between the Professional Game Match Officials Limited (PGMOL) and the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) to help understand current levels of confidence in VAR and to increase the trustworthiness of the process.

The RSS is a membership organisation for over 10,000 statisticians and data scientists, and a charity which promotes the use of data for the public good. The Society's strapline *Data, Evidence, Decisions* has relevance here, in that it comprises the core components of the VAR process.

Using technology such as VAR will inevitably involve some level of human oversight and interpretation and when communicating in a high-pressure environment, mistakes will sometimes be made. The challenge is to improve the reliability of the process - a key component of trustworthiness alongside competence and integrity. In this context, reliability could be viewed as taking steps to minimise the variability inherent in the process including efforts to standardize elements of human oversight and how information (the order of, say) is communicated to on-site referees.

Though the circumstances are somewhat different, there are similarities with other ways in which statistics and data are used to inform decision-making – for example, during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this situation, policy makers, supported by statisticians, were working with uncertainty and had to make judgement calls under pressure. Indeed, as a result of these challenges, the Society has started an initiative called *Statistics under Pressure* which is directed at informing decision making at pace, in particular to deepen the understanding of how trade-offs can be employed in line with good practice among statisticians and analysts.

A key principle in this context is transparency. It is well established that transparency and openness is vital for demonstrating trustworthiness and building public confidence. I am aware that



some steps have been taken towards this with VAR but in general greater openness and transparency will build greater trust and build public confidence.

Notwithstanding the need to increase reliability, it is also important to think about how trustworthiness and confidence is measured and evaluated through time. Part of this could involve providing evidence of the impact of VAR on the number of incorrect decisions that are made over the course of a season. It could also mean advising on the process for regularly gathering the views of key stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of measures taken through surveys and random sampling.

The RSS would be pleased to support the PGMOL to increase public understanding of the use of VAR as a tool and the role it can play in decision-making.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Andrew Garrett
President

