

**Law 12 Fouls and Misconduct**

**Explanations and Interpretations  
for the Intermediate and Advanced  
Youth Referees**

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## **Introduction**

While all the laws of soccer are important, enforcing law 12 creates the most opportunities for a referee to use judgement. With very young players, little real knowledge of law 12 is required. My initial training on law 12, "if it looks dangerous, blow your whistle and let the other team kick the ball." was sufficient for a U-6 game. With U-14, improper enforcement of law 12 can lead to loss of control of the match. Much of what is considered fair and unfair in soccer is contained in this one law. Proper enforcement of law 12 is the most important aspect of giving the players and yourself a fair, safe, and fun match.

## **What is a foul?**

A foul is a foul play. It is when one team gains an unfair advantage by "breaking the rules." This definition puts certain restrictions on what constitutes a foul.

## **When can a foul occur?**

The first restriction is that the ball must be in play for a foul to occur. If the ball is out of play then there can be no "foul play" because there is no play. If a team does something unsporting or gains an unfair advantage by an action which occurred while the ball is out of play, it cannot be a foul, but it is likely to be a misconduct, which is discussed later.

## **Who can commit a foul?**

In soccer only players can be involved in the play. Therefore, only a player can commit a foul. Even if a substitute ran onto the field and tripped an opponent who was about to score, she committed a misconduct but not a foul, because she was a substitute not a player. In this circumstance the substitute is treated like an outside agent, such as a by-stander or spectator, instead of a teammate.

## **Against whom is a foul committed?**

A foul can only be committed against the opposing team. Except for deliberately handling the ball, which is directed at the opposing team as a whole, all of the other fouls must be directed at an opposing player. Spitting at anyone is a send off misconduct (red card offense), but it must be at an opposing player to be a direct kick foul.

## **Where can a foul take place?**

A foul can take place only on the field of play, within the area enclosed by the touch and goal lines, since this is the only place where play can take place. If the unfair action takes place off the field, then it can be a misconduct, but not a foul. The place where a foul occurs is the place where the unfair action occurs. This usually only becomes an issue with fouls that occur at a distance, such as deliberately throwing the ball at an opponent to injure or intimidate him (striking). The International Football Association Board interpretation for this situation has recently changed. The foul occurred where the ball hit or would have hit the opponent. The old interpretation was that the foul occurred where the ball was released. A punch occurs where it hits or would have hit the opponent. If a goalkeeper in her penalty area, punches an opponent outside the penalty area, the correct restart is a direct free kick, because the foul occurred outside the penalty area.

This point could also be a consideration on the edge of the field. If the unfair action is initiated on the field and goes off the field, then it could be a foul. If an unfair action by a player is initiated off the field, but comes onto the field before the referee decides to stop play, then it can be a foul and the place where the foul occurred is where the action came onto the field. I would consider players to be in the field of play if they were actually playing a ball which is in the field of play. This clearly fits the criteria of being a foul play.

A referee must be very careful with such an interpretation, because the International Football Association Board has made it clear that infractions off the field of play are not fouls. Here are two situations specifically addressed in answers from the Board. An attacking player dribbling the ball along the touch line, kicks the ball ahead, and then goes off the field of play to go around a defender, and chase the ball. The defender goes off the field with the attacker. An infraction by

either player could be a misconduct but cannot be a foul. A goalkeeper and an attacker are beyond the goal line, in the goal. An infraction by either player could be a misconduct but cannot be a foul.

### **What constitutes a foul?**

Here law 12 is fairly clear. Fouls are divided into two categories. There are ten actions for which the opponent is awarded a direct free kick, or if committed by a defender in his penalty area the opponent is awarded a penalty kick. These are commonly called "penal" fouls. There are eight "non-penal" (also now called technical) fouls for which the opponent is awarded an indirect free kick. In the list with the "non-penal" fouls is another reason to award an indirect free kick which is associated with misconduct and will be discussed under misconduct. Some players and coaches think that it is the severity of the action which determines if the kick is direct or indirect, but this is not the case. It is the particular action which determines the form of the free kick.

The other aspect of the question, what constitutes a foul, is how severe does an action have to be to be a foul. First we need to look at AYSO's National Rules and Regulations which state: "The laws of soccer are intended to provide that games should be played with as little interference as possible, and in this view it is the duty of referees to penalize only deliberate breaches of the law. Constant whistling for trifling and doubtful breaches produces bad feeling and loss of temper on the part of the players and spoils the pleasure of spectators." As much as we can, we need to let the players play.

We also need to go back to the definition of a foul. If a team did not gain an unfair advantage by an action, is it a foul? Probably not, as long as the action was not unsporting.

This leads to another reason to call fouls, and this becomes more critical as the players become older. Fouls are called to control the match. If the players feel that the referee is allowing unsporting actions to go unpunished, they will punish the offender. The referee must be clear in her mind what is considered sporting or not in soccer, and enforce the laws in accordance with that concept. If this concept is different than the players concept of sporting, then it is the duty of the referee to make it clear to the players what is considered sporting is in soccer. Much of what is impeding, is allowed in other American sports, but it is considered unsporting in soccer. The referee should never ignore unsporting behavior because the players feel it is sporting.

Flow and control is a class in the National 2 Referee Course, but the ideas should be understood at this level of refereeing. Often it is necessary for the referee to call a "tighter" game early in a match and allow more flow to the match as the players are sure that he will enforce the laws and they don't need to take matters into their own hands or feet.

Sometime in their careers, most referees have made the mistake of allowing too much early in a match, and then have had to increase their discipline later to prevent the gentlemanly game of soccer from returning to its medieval origins of being a melee. While it is the players who determine if it will be an easy or difficult match, if retaliation becomes a significant part of the play, the referee probably could have done better. He should learn from the match, and next time apply an ounce of prevention to avoid a pound of cure.

### **What are the ten direct kick (penal) fouls?**

The direct kick fouls are divided into two categories. The first six must be done in a way which the referee considers to be careless, reckless, or with excessive force. They are:

- Kicks or attempts to kick an opponent
- Trips or attempts to trip an opponent
- Strikes or attempts to strike an opponent
- Pushes an opponent
- Charges an opponent
- Jumps at an opponent

The other four are:

Holds an opponent

Spits at an opponent

Tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball

Handles the ball deliberately

### **What does it mean to be careless, reckless, or use excessive force?**

To be careless means that a person did not use due caution while trying to make the play. Most fouls especially in youth soccer fall into this category. This would include the fouls where the player did not try to foul the opponent, she just wanted to play the ball. The opponent got in the way and the player did not really seem aware of her presence. This also includes the fouls where the player made a bad decision about being able to make the play, hoping not to be called for the foul.

Reckless means to make motions not normally needed to make the play. Such motions are usually intended to intimidate the opponent or in some other way gain an unfair advantage. It is really the intimidation factor which characterizes these fouls. These are the fouls when one team is "telling" the other team that "every time you get close to the ball we are going to go after you. We are bigger and tougher than you and we will make you pay for trying to play the ball." This may be a common tactic in American football, but it is not allowed in soccer. The referee must make sure it is not worthwhile for the infringer to engage in such intimidation. Such fouls normally would call for a caution as well as the foul.

Excessive force means using more force than needed to make a fair play and in doing so the player has placed the opponent in danger of bodily harm. Other than boxing, such actions are not allowed in any sport. At all levels of play, but especially youth soccer, the referee cannot allow players to deliberately try to injure the opponents. Excessive force penalties normally require a send off.

How do these concepts apply to soccer? While soccer is a "gentlemanly" sport, it is not without physical contact. While soccer may be war, there are real limits on what deliberate contact is allowed and when. The allowed contact, fair charging, is described further below under charging.

The first constraint is that deliberate contact is only allowed when trying to play the ball. Any of the six listed contacts which occurs when the ball is not within playing distance of the person making the contact, is clearly considered to be either careless or reckless. When the ball is within playing distance, any of the listed contacts done using more force than is needed to play the ball is clearly reckless or with excessive force. This has special issues in youth soccer. First this is not world cup soccer. Protecting the players from being hurt has to be a much greater concern to us, than it can be for a FIFA referee that the players may see on TV. Also the bigger size differences which we see in youth soccer, creates problems determining what is excessive force.

### **Kicks or attempts to kick an opponent**

This and the next two contacts clearly need to be looked at carefully since even the attempt without making contact is a direct kick foul. The question here is what is the advantage that a team gets by attempting to kick an opponent. The advantage is intimidation even if the foul was not reckless. It is in the player backing off this time, or next time to avoid being kicked. The player must know that the referee will enforce the laws to protect him from being hurt. The player must also know that it will not be worth his while to try to hurt, or intimidate the opponents for the cost to his team will be too great.

The requirement for the kick to be careless, reckless or with excessive force means that mere contact of a player's foot with an opponent is not necessarily a foul. It also means that contacting the ball first is not sufficient to avoid the foul. It is all a matter of judgement, the referee's judgement.

Some of the questions to be asked are: Was the player playing the ball, or trying to kick the opponent? Attempting to "play the man" instead of the ball is clearly a foul. Should the player have changed his motion to play the ball without making contact with the opponent? If he could have and did not, that is clearly careless or reckless. In youth soccer, this version of the foul often occurs as the extra follow through after kicking the ball. With older players, a player may deliberately kick over the ball, to make it look like she is playing the ball while the player is really trying to kick the opponent.

There is another form that this foul takes. If an opposing player kicks the ball which is in the possession of the goalkeeper, it is considered kicking the goalkeeper, even if he only kicks the ball and does not touch the goalkeeper. Possession by the goalkeeper, means the goalkeeper controlling the ball with his hands. This is usually seen as the goalkeeper with the ball on the ground, and an attacker kicking the ball into the goal. If the goalkeeper had possession, this is a direct kick foul. Having the ball stationary on the ground with one hand on the ball is sufficient for the goalkeeper to have possession.

### **Trips or attempts to trip an opponent**

This is usually an easy foul to see. The referee can also expect a lot of help from the coaches and spectators. The more important question with this foul is: which of these calls made by spectators are actually not a fouls. The most common non-foul is for a defender to put his foot out and stop the ball. The attacking player then trips over the stopped ball. There is no foul, it is a clean tackle.

Another common play to watch for is a sliding tackle. If the defender makes contact with the ball and then the attacker trips on the outstretched leg, this may or may not be a trip. The question about careless and reckless comes into play. Could the player have changed his motion to play the ball without making contact with the opponent? More importantly, if there is any motion by the defender to try to make contact with the attacker after tackling the ball, then there probably is a trip. This is usually seen as a defender raising his leg a little as the attacker tries to go over it chasing the ball. While it is a foul for a player to attempt to trip an opponent, it is not necessarily a foul to have an opponent trip over the player.

There is another variation to watch for. One leg goes for the ball while the other goes to trip the player. This takes reasonable coordination, but might be seen at U-14. It could happen without the offending player really trying, in which case it is probably a foul because it is careless.

There are other versions of this foul which may not look like tripping to an untrained eye. Stooping in front of or behind an opponent to have him trip over your body is tripping.

### **Strikes or attempts to strike an opponent**

I have never seem this foul in youth soccer, but when it occurs, it must be dealt with severely. Besides being a direct kick foul, the action is usually a send off misconduct as well. The one non-punching form of this foul is striking with the ball, or possibly another object. This would usually be a goalkeeper throwing the ball at the head of an opponent to injure or intimidate him. To intimidate the opponent is reckless, and unsporting behavior for which a caution should be issued. Attempting to injure an opponent, is clearly excessive force and the send off offense of violent conduct.

Throwing the ball at an opponent is not necessarily striking. It is a valid tactic to hit an opponent in the back with a throw-in, so the player who is performing the throw-in can play the ball again. Here the criteria for this action being a foul would be the excessive force. Was the ball thrown harder than needed to accomplish the task? Also the tactic is best accomplished by hitting the player in the back, throwing at the head is a poor tactic and probably striking because it is reckless. The correct restart for this foul would be a direct free kick at the spot of the touch line from which the throw-in was taken.

### **Jumps at an opponent**

This is not a very common foul, but it is sometimes seen in youth soccer. Often attempting to block a kick, a player will jump at an opponent. Often it is directed at the opponent because the ball is already by the player. It also could happen that the player was trying to block the ball but was careless or reckless and wound up jumping at the player as well. Sometimes this is seen as the Goalkeeper putting up both legs as he goes for the ball and the player. Was the Goalkeeper protecting himself or jumping at the player? A player has the right to his position, as long as he is trying to play the ball. Again the issue comes down to judgement.

### **Charges an opponent**

This foul is a little complicated to explain because there is something called fair charging. For a charge to be fair the ball must be within playing distance. Charging when the ball is not within playing distance is generally impeding which is described below. Fair charging is normally shoulder to shoulder without using the arms to push the opponent. In youth soccer with larger height differences reason must be applied. The contact must be from or directed to the shoulder of the shorter player, or from or to the torso (arm at the side) of the taller player. Since jumping at an opponent is a foul, one or both feet must be on the ground. The contact should be with staccato, not continuous contact.

Any charge which is careless reckless or with excessive force, even if it meets the other criteria for being a fair charge, is a direct kick foul. Such a charge is still a direct kick foul and not impeding even if the ball is not within playing distance. The object of a charge is to try to play the ball. Did the player use more force than was needed to play the ball? Just because the smaller player fell down, does not necessarily mean that excessive force was used. Was the charge an attempt to intimidate the opponent? If yes, then it is a foul and possibly a cautionable misconduct. If the excessive force was an attempt to injure the opponent, it was probably a send-off misconduct as well as charging.

One example where non-shoulder charging is allowed, is when a player is "guarding" the ball as it goes out of play, usually so her team can have the throw-in. That player is playing the ball even though she has not touched it. This is called fair obstruction. That player is using her back to prevent the opponent from playing the ball. This player may be charged in the back in the area of the shoulder blade, but not in the middle of the back. It must be an attempt to push the player to the side and go around her, not to go through or over the player. Sometimes the player obstructing, can carelessly charge the opponent. The player moves backwards into the opponent, away from the ball to prevent the opponent from playing the ball. If the obstructing player moves outside playing distance of the ball, and makes contact with the opponent, she is unfairly charging.

A non-shoulder form of charging which is not allowed is the hockey style hip check. The player puts out her hip to block the opponent from going around her. She is beaten. The player is desperate to prevent the opponent from playing the ball. If there is contact, this is charging, if there is no contact it is probably impeding.

It is considered careless for a player to charge an opponent while the opponent is being charged by the player's teammate. This is what is commonly called a "sandwich." This prohibition against "sandwiching" an opponent does not mean that the opponents should be penalized if a player tries to wedge himself between two opponents who have already established their positions. That player is probably guilty of a careless charge.

The bottom line is that fair charging always involves attempting to play the ball. If the player's eyes are on the opponent and not on the ball, can he really be playing the ball? Probably not.

### **Pushes an opponent**

This is fairly common in youth soccer especially at the lower levels. Fair charging with the shoulder is not enough, the push is added to it. This version of the foul is fairly easy to see, the

referee should expect help with this call from the spectators. Again the criteria of careless, reckless, or with excessive force must be met before it is a foul.

A version of this foul which can be difficult to see is pushing from behind. The bodies of the players often screen the push from the referee. The foul often occurs away from the ball especially on corner and goal kicks. Two players fight for position to head the ball. The question here is who had position. Is one player pushing with his hands or chest or is the other pushing with his back? Calling this foul may be important to keep the match under control. It may not matter which team is called for the foul, as long as a foul is called.

### **Holds an opponent**

Unlike the prior six fouls, holding an opponent does not have to be careless, reckless, or with excessive force. It just has to happen. It is very easy to gain an advantage by slowing the opponent down by holding them. This usually is seen as grabbing the opponents shirt. It is a good reason to have the players tuck in their shirts. If their shirts are grabbed then their shirts will be pulled out. Another very common form of holding is putting out an arm to stop the opponent from going by. This is often seen when a player is guarding the ball going out of play. He is allowed to block the opponent with his torso, not his arms. Blocking with the torso does not mean that hockey style hip checks are allowed. For a player to stick out his hip to block or knock over an opponent is a foul, charging. It is not playing the ball, but is clearly playing the man.

Holding also occurs when two players fall and one tries to prevent the other from getting up. This holding might be with the arms or legs.

Holding is usually an act of desperation when a player is beaten.

### **Spits at an opponent**

I have not seen this in youth soccer. If it happens it is not only a direct kick foul, but it is a send off misconduct. It has no place in AYSO or any soccer.

### **Tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball**

Tackling in soccer does not mean the same thing as it does in American football. It means to steal the ball from the opponent. While this is an important tactic in soccer, it must be done safely. The ball must be contacted first. If the ball is contacted first, it does not mean that anything is allowed, it just means that this particular foul was not committed. Often this foul is seen in slide tackling, where there is less control of the tackler's motion. Again, this foul does not have to be careless, reckless, or with excessive force. The only requirement is that contact is made with the opponent, before the ball.

### **Handles the ball deliberately**

This is the only foul which is not committed against an opponent, but against the opposing team. This is a foul for which you should expect a lot of help from players and spectators. Also expect the players to stop playing if they see a "handball."

The first question is what is handling? Handling is contacting the ball with the arm from the outside of the shoulder to the fingers. It also includes contacting the ball with anything in the hands. This might occur when a player adjusting her shoe, hits the ball with a shoe held in the hand. Throwing the shoe at the ball would also be handling. Such an action would clearly be at least unsporting, a yellow card, or possibly denying a goal scoring opportunity, a red card.

The second question is when is the handling deliberate. The determination of "deliberate" for the purposes of Law 12 does not require that the referee become a mind reader. The referee is only asked to make judgements on what he observes. It is sufficient for the referee to judge that the player could have avoided the contact or once the incidental contact occurred the player could have ended the contact sooner for the contact to be deliberate.

With younger players this foul can be fairly obvious, but can become more subtle as the players mature. The usual expression is that “hand to ball” is a foul, but “ball to hand” is not. While this is a good general guideline, it does not cover all situations. Often a player who is going to chest the ball will position his hands to help with possible ball control. If the ball bounces off the chest and contacts the hands or arms, that is deliberately handling the ball even though his hands did not move to the ball. The hands were positioned in a way to possibly handle the ball and therefore the action was deliberate. Any time that the ball contacts the hands when they are not in what the referee thinks is a “normal” position it is deliberately handling the ball even if the player never saw the ball.

There is another common situation which does not meet the general guideline. When a player instinctively puts up his arms to protect himself, it is not necessarily a foul even though the hand moved to the ball. The question becomes did he try to do anything besides protection? It is the little motion at the end, when the player tries to have the ball land in a certain spot that is the foul. If the ball lands in a advantageous spot, but there was no attempt to direct it there, then there is no foul. In this case the referee must be very deliberate in her immediate “no call.” This could be a hard call to sell.

There is another common problematic situation. The player has her arm right against his side. If the ball hits the arm, then it is probably not deliberately handling the ball. If the player moves her shoulder to direct the ball then it is deliberate even with the arm directly against the torso. This shoulder motion is deliberate handling even when the majority of contact with the ball is with the chest. This foul will require a very decisive call by the referee.

There are some situations where the goalkeeper might be guilty of the foul of deliberately handling the ball. The goalkeeper is allowed to handle the ball in his own penalty area. It is the position of the ball and the hands not the goalkeeper’s feet which determine if the action was in the penalty area or not. This might be an issue when a goalkeeper picks up a ball at the edge of the penalty area, or when he punts the ball at the edge of the penalty area. The goalkeepers feet may be outside of the penalty area as long as the ball and her hands remain within the penalty area.

When a goalkeeper lunges for the ball, handles it in the penalty area, and then slides out of the penalty area, is she guilty of this foul? The considerations here are deliberate and was there an advantage. If the goalkeeper released the ball “immediately” when she stopped moving, there was probably no advantage and, it was probably not a deliberate breach of the laws. If the release is not immediate, then it is a foul.

#### **What are the eight indirect free kick (non-penal) fouls?**

Five are committed by the goalkeeper in his penalty area. They are:

- Handles the ball after releasing it into play
- Handles the ball after it has been deliberately kicked by a teammate
- Handles the ball directly from a throw-in by a teammate
- Takes more than six seconds before releasing the ball into play
- Wastes time

The other three can be committed by anyone. They are:

- Impedes an opponent’s progress
- Plays in a dangerous manner
- Prevents the goalkeeper from releasing the ball into play

The other reason to award an indirect kick is, “commits any other offense, not previously mentioned in Law 12, for which play is stopped to caution or dismiss a player.” This is an addition to the laws in 1998 to correct an omission in the 1997 rewrite of the laws. An indirect free kick is the correct restart when play is stopped to deal with a player’s misconduct which occurred on the field of play. If the misconduct was off the field, then the restart is a dropped ball, because there

cannot be an indirect kick at the spot of the infraction since it was off the field. If play is stopped to deal with the misconduct of a substitute, then the correct restart is a dropped ball no matter where the misconduct occurred.

### **Handles the ball after releasing it into play**

This foul along with the other four goalkeeper technical or non-penal fouls, have their origin in preventing the goalkeeper from gaining an unfair advantage from the right to use her hands. These fouls are particularly directed at using the goalkeeper's ability to handle the ball as a tactic to waste time to protect a lead.

Releasing the ball into play means that the goalkeeper is no longer controlling the ball with his hands. If the goalkeeper deliberately parries the ball instead of catching it, he has released it into play and can no longer handle the ball until touched by another player. The key here is that the act of parrying the ball is an act of control and then release. When the goalkeeper deflects a shot on goal, there is little if any control, so therefore she can handle the ball again without another player touching it. The critical judgment is control. If there was no control, then there can be no release into play.

Bouncing the ball, as a basketball player would, is not releasing the ball into play. Control by the hands is maintained and therefore this is legal. The same is true of throwing the ball into the air and catching it. Here if it was thrown very high, where the goalkeeper would lose control of it, this could be considered release into play. Throwing the ball up and then having it hit the ground (the combination of the two above acts) is considered release, and the goal keeper may not play the ball again with her hands. Dropping the ball to punt or kick it, is release into play. If the goalkeeper misses the ball he may not pick it up again. This form of the foul is sometimes seen in youth soccer.

If you go back to law 12 prior to the 1997 re-write of the laws, you will see that the wording of this part of the law was much more complex. "having released the ball into play before, during, or after 4 steps, he touches it again with his hands, before it has been touched or played by a player of the opposing team either inside or outside of the penalty area, or by a player of the same team outside the penalty area..." With the re-write, there was not intent to change the law. While the current wording is simple, it is still meant to cover the situations specifically covered in the pre-1997 law. Therefore the ball must be touched by an opponent, or by a teammate who is outside the penalty area in between the goalkeeper handling the ball to avoid this foul.

### **Handles the ball after it has been deliberately kicked to him by a teammate**

When the ball was last touched by the foot of a teammate, this foul is possible. What does it mean, "deliberately kicked to him?" The first point is kicked. This part of the law does not apply to kneeling, chesting, or heading the ball, unless there is a deliberate trick involved in the play, which will be discussed later.

The next critical point is deliberate. Did the ball go where the player expected it to go? If not, how could it be deliberate? There are a few common situations where deliberate comes into play. In a heavy wind the ball kicked forward, may come back to the goalkeeper. If a youth can deliberately do this kind of play, then she is better than any player I have seen. This is probably not deliberate. Another common situation is when a player tries to redirect an opponent's pass or shot on goal. It is rare in this kind of situation for the player to have enough control of where the ball goes for it to be deliberately kicked anywhere.

The last point is, "to him." This can be the most problematic. The official USSF interpretation is that if the ball was deliberately kicked to a place where the goalkeeper can use his hands, that is into the penalty area, that is sufficient for the kick to be "to him." This presents an opportunity for misconduct by flaunting the law. If the ball is kicked by a teammate to a place outside the penalty area, then the goalkeeper may bring the ball into the penalty area and legally use her hands. She is not her own teammate. If the ball is going into the penalty area, but the goalkeeper goes out to

receive it, brings it into the penalty area, and uses his hands, then he has not only committed this foul, but a misconduct. The ball was still kicked to a place where he could use his hands even though the goalkeeper stopped it before it reached that area. By doing this the goalkeeper has flaunted the law, and should be cautioned for unsporting behavior.

Considering youth soccer, and the origin of the law being to avoid wasting time, I think there are circumstances where a stronger “to him” should be required, than just being kicked into the penalty area. Going back to an older interpretation of the kick going generally in the direction of where the goalkeeper is standing is reasonable, but it is not without problems as well. Here is the situation. The ball goes off the foot of the defender. It seems to go where the defender wanted the ball to go, and it is away from the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper runs out of the goal, and picks up the ball. Was the ball deliberately kicked to him? If the goalkeeper immediately runs out for the ball as if he knew where it was going to be played, then it might be a set play, designed to circumvent the law. In this case the ball was deliberately kicked to the goalkeeper. A set play designed to circumvent the law would require not only the foul to be called, but the referee to caution the defender who kicked the ball for unsporting behavior. This would be especially important, if this situation had already occurred in the match, but the goalkeeper’s delay in going to the ball was enough to have the referee decide, the ball wasn’t “to him.”

When the ball is kicked into “no man’s land” and after hesitation the goalkeeper runs and lunges for the ball before an attacker can get to it, it was probably not to him. This last scenario clearly does not meet the spirit of this law to prevent time wasting.

While there are other possible deliberate tricks to circumvent this law, I have not seen them attempted in youth soccer. A player may take a free kick pop it up, and head the ball to the goalkeeper. In these situations the relevant questions are: Was there an obvious attempt to flaunt the law? If this is true, then the foul and caution are in order. Did the opposing team have a fair chance to play the ball in between the kick and the other action which would normally allow the goalkeeper to handle the ball? If they did, then there probably was no foul or misconduct.

When the referee determines that a deliberate trick occurs, then there is no actual requirement that the goalkeeper touch the ball. The misconduct is committed by performing the act which flaunts the law. If the goalkeeper does not touch the ball, the deliberate flaunting of the law must be absolutely obvious before this misconduct is called.

#### **Handles the ball directly from a throw-in by a teammate**

If the ball is thrown in by a teammate, then the goalkeeper cannot be the first to touch it. There is no requirement for “deliberate” or “to him” in this part of the law. If it is touched by another player, it is not directly to him. If the other player is a teammate, then the same questions about misconduct to circumvent the law apply here as they do above.

#### **Takes more than six seconds before releasing the ball into play**

This part of the law went into effect in 2000. The original version of the law did not allow the goalkeeper to take more than four steps before releasing the ball into play. This was hard to enforce because the four steps did not include steps taken while gaining control of the ball, steps taken during the normal continuation of momentum from getting to the ball, or steps taken to avoid near-by opponents. I do not expect this part of the law to play an important role in youth soccer, even though it is common for a very young goalkeeper to hold the ball for more than six seconds. Remember the origin of the law is to prevent time wasting as a tactic. The goalkeeper holding the ball in youth soccer is rarely done to waste time. It is usually due to confusion on what to do by an inexperienced player. Verbal encouragement to get rid of the ball and get play started again is normally the correct response for the referee. Unlike in basketball, the referee should not be visibly marking the six seconds.

#### **Wastes time**

This can only be done by the goalkeeper, and only while holding the ball. If the goalkeeper wanted to dribble the ball with her feet, back and forth with no apparent purpose other than using up time, that is OK. If the goalkeeper picks up the ball, she must release it into play within five or six seconds, or she is guilty of wasting time. The referee is instructed not to be obviously counting the time as is done in basketball.

This is not a usual foul in youth soccer. Remember that the origin of the law is to prevent deliberate wasting of time to gain an unfair advantage. Usually when a goalkeeper is holding the ball for more than the allotted time, it is due to confusion on what to do, not a deliberate attempt to waste time. Often it is done by the team which is behind. Is there an advantage for them to waste time? Probably not. Verbal encouragement to get play going again is usually a more effective way to deal with excessive holding the ball in youth soccer.

### **Impedes an opponent's progress**

This is one of the rarest calls in youth soccer, even though it occurs frequently. It is the subject of one of the classes in the section referee course. In soccer, you are not allowed to take actions to prevent an opponent from getting to the ball or attempting to become involved in the play unless you are within playing distance of the ball. Any such action is impeding. Simply put, any attempt to "play the man" before a player is within a few feet of the ball is impeding. Thus charging when the ball is not within playing distance is impeding. If there is contact, the referee could consider it to be charging if it was careless. Charging which is reckless, or with excessive force when the ball is not within playing distance, should be treated as charging and misconduct. Contact is often made by the player who is being impeded, due to continuation of her momentum. It may look like charging from behind by that player, while the correct call is impeding by the player who was run into.

A player who is "guarding or shielding" a ball as it goes out of play is not impeding, but is fairly obstructing, because he is within playing distance of the ball, and therefore playing the ball even without touching it.

Impeding takes a number of forms.

A player is running to the ball, but does not take a direct route to the ball. She takes a route to position herself between an opponent and the ball before she is within playing distance of the ball. This action interferes with the opponent's progress to ball. That player is guilty of impeding. Sometimes this happens with the player once he has positioned himself between the opponent and the ball, slows down. The opponent then runs into the player. It looks like a charge or a push on the opponent. It is not. It is still impeding by the player who is run into.

A player running to the ball, performs actions which would be a fair charge, except not within playing distance of the ball. That player is guilty of impeding.

On a corner kick, an attacker set up in front of the goalkeeper. When the ball is kicked, the attacker does not go to the ball. Often the attacker will back into the goalkeeper, although this is not required for it to be impeding. Her actions are meant to prevent the goalkeeper from getting to play the ball. That attacker is guilty of impeding.

A defender is standing his ground trying to tackle the ball. The attacker kicks the ball around the defender, maybe through the legs. The attacker then runs into the defender. The defender had the right to her position. The defender did not impede. The attacker charged or pushed the defender. If the defender moves to run into the attacker who is going around the defender, then if contact is made the defender is probably guilty of a direct kick foul, like tripping, or pushing. If no contact is made, it is probably impeding.

As with any foul, the referee wants to avoid calling trifling impeding. There needs to be an advantage gained or an issue of match control to avoid retaliation before this foul should be

called. When the impeding is involved in play going to the ball, the issue is usually advantage. When the impeding is far away from the play, the issue is to avoid retaliation.

### **Plays in a dangerous manner**

I think we all understand why this is a problem for youth soccer. Player safety is one of our most important jobs as referees. Why should it be a foul in the FIFA laws? What is the unfair advantage a player gains by playing dangerously? Having the opponent back off from a fair play for the ball this time or next time to avoid being hurt or avoid hurting the opponent, is an unfair advantage caused by playing in a dangerous manner.

Playing in a dangerous manner is a foul, therefore must involve an opponent. The danger can be to the opponent or to the player. If a player is "playing dangerously" toward a teammate, that player might be guilty of the misconduct of unsporting behavior, but not the foul of playing dangerously. If the referee wants to stop play to deal with "dangerous play" against a teammate without issuing a caution, she can invoke the right implied in law 8 to temporarily stop play for "any reason not mentioned elsewhere in the Laws of the Game." The restart for such a stoppage would be a dropped ball. Care must be taken that this stoppage does not give an advantage to the offending team. If it was necessary to stop play to deal with "dangerous play" against a teammate, at a time when it was disadvantageous to the non-offending team, then a caution would be in order.

While the law only requires that the referee consider the play to be dangerous, there are some generally accepted actions which are considered dangerous. There are also some myths about dangerous play as well.

There is a myth that playing the ball while on the ground is dangerous play. This is not true. If there is no opponent in the area, there is nothing dangerous about playing the ball while on the ground. If an opponent and the ball are in the area, then dangerous play is possible, but it is not based on whether the player on the ground is trying to play the ball or not. There is dangerous play by an opponent when a player is prevented from making a fair play on the ball because of the possibility of injuring the opponent who has put himself in the way.

This can be seen in a number of ways. A player cannot play the ball because an opponent has fallen on it. A player is prevented from making a fair play on the ball because the goalkeeper has pinned the ball on the ground with her body without using her hands or arms. Examples of this would be the goalkeeper trapping the ball with her legs or the goalkeeper is on her back with the ball underneath her. Most other situations involving the goalkeeper in his penalty area, would have the ball within reach of her hands. If the goalkeeper had used her hands in addition to her body, the attacker would be guilty of kicking or attempting to kick the goalkeeper by trying to play the ball, as discussed above. To head a ball below the waist while an opponent is there and would normally be trying to kick the ball is dangerous. A player cannot play the ball because an opponent near the ball, is attempting to play it while on the ground, thus the origin of the myth. The critical issue is not playing the ball while on the ground, but rather the inability to play the ball by the opponent.

It is also dangerous play to put an opponent in danger by playing the ball inappropriately. A attacker backs off a fair play on the ball because the goalkeeper has jumped up with his legs raised. Did the goalkeeper jump at the attacker? Did the goalkeeper make contact with the attacker, kicking? Both are penal fouls. If not, dangerous play is possible. If in the opinion of the referee the goalkeeper raised his legs to protect himself, then there would be no dangerous play on his part. To kick a ball above the waist, where a header would be more appropriate when an opponent is in a position to play the ball, is dangerous. A scissors kick, with opponents in the area can be dangerous play.

Contact is not required for a play to be dangerous. Actually it would normally be the penal foul of kicking if contact is made. The penal foul of attempting to kick an opponent is often not appropriate if there is no contact, because the attempt was to play the ball. This foul is in not

allowing the opponent a fair play on the ball. These examples above are not meant to limit the definition of dangerous play, but to provide examples of it.

### **Prevents the goalkeeper from releasing the ball into play**

This foul, like the goalkeeper fouls, is directed at getting play going again, except in this case it is directed at the opponent trying to make the goalkeeper to waste time. The prohibition is similar to that in law 15, the throw in, which says that an opponent cannot unfairly distract or impede the thrower. The attacker does not have to retreat from the goalkeeper, but he cannot move to the goalkeeper or make motions to distract the goalkeeper. When the goalkeeper has possession of the ball, an opposing player may not take actions to dispossess her of the ball. As stated above, kicking the ball out of the goalkeepers hand is considered kicking the goalkeeper and results in a direct free kick. When the goalkeeper is holding the ball, bouncing the ball on the ground, throwing it in the air (still under her control), or holding it stationary on the ground with as little as one finger, any actions by an opposing player to gain possession of the ball is at the least this foul if not one of the direct kick fouls.

### **What is the discipline for a foul?**

The normal discipline for a foul is to stop play and award the non-offending team a free kick from the spot of the foul. The kick is a direct free kick, if the foul called is one of the ten penal fouls. An indirect kick is awarded if the foul is one of the eight "non-penal" or technical fouls. If one of the direct free kick fouls is committed by a defender in her own penalty area, the non-offending team is awarded a penalty kick. Non-penal fouls are not disciplined by awarding a penalty kick.

There are times when stopping play to enforce a foul is to the advantage of the offending team. Law 5 gives the referee the power to call the foul, but let play continue to the benefit of the non-offending team. This is called "allowing the advantage" or "invoking the advantage clause." While the use of the advantage clause is a class in the section course, understanding some of the principles is necessary at this level.

The first principle is that the foul is called, but play is not stopped. This is expressed by saying, "play on, advantage." The words "play on" should not be used in any other context, but invoking the advantage clause. Often players stop because they think that the ball was out of play or there was a foul when there was none, such as an inadvertent hand ball, and the referee needs to indicate that play should continue. The referee should use words like "keep playing," or "no foul," or "the ball is still in play," but not "play on." There is also a signal for indicating the advantage shown in the law book. It is important that the players and coaches know that you saw the foul, called it, and allowed the advantage. The law has changed so that now if the advantage is lost or does not occur within 2 to 3 seconds, the referee can reverse the decision to allow the advantage and award the free kick.

It should be understood that allowing the advantage is never required. It is always a balance between match control and not punishing the non-offending team. In the defensive zone it is rare that there would be a significant disadvantage to stopping play, except for when a team has an organized counter-attack and a lot of open space for the advance, so the advantage clause is used sparingly in that part of the field. The same is true in the middle transition zone. Unless there is a lot of room to advance and the defensive team is all in their attacking zone the advantage should not be applied. In the attacking zone outside the penalty area, is where the advantage is the greatest. Here there should be significant issues of match control before the advantage is not allowed. This would normally be due to a serious physical foul.

Before the 1996 change in the laws to allow the reversal of the advantage, the advantage was almost never allowed for a defensive direct kick foul in the penalty area. In the penalty area there is little advantage to allow play to continue especially for direct kick fouls, unless there is a "sure" goal since a penalty kick is a fairly "sure" goal. With the current law the referee can allow the advantage to see if there is the opportunity for the sure goal, and go back and call the penalty kick if it does not materialize. A missed goal caused by poor skill and not the foul is not a reason to

reverse the advantage call. Which is to the attackers' advantage to allow play to continue, or stop play for the free kick or penalty kick? Even an indirect kick can be a powerful weapon in the penalty area. If the match is in control, the referee must make the call which he believes will benefit the non-offending team the most.

Allowing the advantage is only applied to infringements of law 12. Advantage cannot be allowed for infringements of any other laws such as laws 11 or 15. If the referee were to decide not to stop play for an infringement of another law it would be because the infringement was trifling, not because he was allowing the advantage.

### **What is misconduct?**

Misconduct is any action which brings the game into disrepute. Essentially misconduct falls into two categories. The first category is fouls which through the violent or unsporting nature of the action, the free kick is not sufficient a discipline. The second category is for unsporting actions which do not fit the criteria for being a foul. There are two levels of misconduct. There are seven actions for which a caution (yellow card) is issued. There are also seven actions for which a send off (red card) is issued.

### **When, where, and by whom are misconducts committed?**

A misconduct may be committed by players, substitutes, team officials, or others. Team officials or others, however, are not shown yellow or red cards as are players and substitutes. Misconduct can be committed on or off the field of play. It can be committed before, during, or after the match, when the ball is in or out of play. It can be committed against opponents, teammates, officials, or spectators.

### **What actions lead to cautions, yellow cards?**

Law 12 lists seven actions for which a caution may be issued. They are:

- Unsporting behavior
- Persistent infringement of the laws
- Showing dissent in action or word
- Failure to respect the distance on free kicks and corner kicks
- Delaying the restart of play
- Leaving the field of play
- Entering or reentering the field of play

### **Unsporting behavior**

This is the most common form of misconduct. It is also the most general form of cautionable offense from which the other specific offenses flow. Common forms of unsporting behavior fall into a number of categories.

One type are the reckless fouls. A send off is too severe for the foul, but the intimidation factor associated with the foul, must be addressed. Often this caution is issued as a matter of match control.

Another type are tactical fouls. This can be seen in older players. It is related to the send off offenses involving denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity, but it occurs as a team is building an attack. It is designed to impede the attack and allow the defense to regroup. It is often seen as holding, pushing or handling the ball. The caution is meant to stop the use of this tactic.

Another type are the interferences. The player who distracts or impedes the opponent throwing in the ball, or the goalkeeper from releasing the ball from her hands. The referee is required to caution a player for impeding the throw-in. It is one of the mandatory cautions. Anyone who verbally distracts an opponent during play or at a restart is guilty of unsporting behavior. This may occur as a opponent calling for the ball, as if he were a teammate of the player. Any verbal actions which can confuse an opponent could be unsporting behavior.

Another type are the deceptions. These include faking a foul (taking a dive), faking an injury or the severity of an injury, changing jerseys with the goalkeeper without the referee's permission, and the kicker engaging in deception during a penalty kick. Changing jerseys with the goalkeeper is a mandatory caution. It is also a mandatory caution to engage in trickery to circumvent the prohibition against the goalkeeper using his hands after the ball is kicked by a teammate.

The last catch all category is anything the referee thinks brings the game into disrepute. This would include, taunting, excessive aggressiveness, or inflammatory behavior.

### **Persistent infringement of the laws**

This can be encountered in a number of forms. For youth soccer, it is usually one player playing out of control committing the same foul, such as tripping or pushing. When calling the fouls and verbal admonishments do not stop the player from fouling, then it is time for a caution. There is no requirement that the player commit the same foul each time. There is no specific number of times that a player need to foul (more than once) for it to be persistent. There is no need for the fouls to be severe. Again it is a judgement about control of the match, and assuring the safety of the other players. If this player's out-of-control actions are intimidating the opponents, it might be time for a caution.

While it is not common in youth soccer, the persistence of fouling does not have to be by the same player. This usually occurs when a team is "taking turns" fouling one of the opponents, often the star player. To participate in a tactic of fouling is technically covered by this misconduct even if the player is cautioned following his first foul. Again the team is trying to gain an unfair advantage by using fouling as a tactic. When calling the fouls does not stop the tactic, then issuing a caution is appropriate.

There is another category persistent infringement of the laws. These are failures to allow play to restart for which the player is warned first and then upon subsequent infringement is cautioned. Infringements of law 14, taking of the penalty kick, fall into this category. Also in this category are failure to restart play promptly after having been previously warned, and the goalkeeper wasting time, after having been warned or penalized for such behavior.

Before issuing a caution for persistent infringement of the laws the referee is required to verbally warn the player or the team that he has noticed this pattern of persistent infringement. The next time the referee has determined that pattern occurred, he must issue the caution. This does not force the referee to issue a caution if another infringement occurs by or against a particular player if the referee does not believe that the infringement was a continuation of the pattern. Here the referee must be extremely careful. His lack of action could be viewed by the players as an unwillingness to issue needed cautions and could severely hamper match control.

### **Delaying the restart of play**

This is related to the non penal (technical) fouls for wasting time. Since this is done while the ball is out of play, waiting for a restart, it is a misconduct and not a foul. This is again done with the intention of using that time for the offending team to gain some unfair advantage, such as regrouping their defense, or trying to use up time to protect a lead. If a verbal warning does not stop this, then it is time for a caution. A verbal warning must be given before the caution is issued. The using up time tactic is ineffective if the referee notices it. The referee can add back to play all the time which was wasted during such tactics, but the regrouping advantage still remains. This is commonly seen, as a player, not giving up the ball for the opponent's free kick.

### **Failure to respect the distance on free kicks and corner kicks**

This again has its origin in trying to gain an unfair advantage by wasting time. Usually the motivation for this tactic is regrouping of the defense. This is not common in youth soccer, but may be seen with older youths. This is commonly seen as a defender not moving the 10 yards from the ball for a free kick, but waiting until his teammates are in their new defensive positions. It can be seen as the defensive "wall" forming less than 10 yards from the ball, and not moving back

went directed by the referee. It can also be seen as a defender coming off the “wall” before the free kick. As with delaying the restart of play, a verbal warning is required before the caution is issued.

### **Leaving the field of play**

This is another unusual misconduct in youth soccer. Players are not allowed to leave the field of play without the referee’s permission, except in the normal course of play. When you determine what is allowed and what isn’t, remember that misconduct is driven by gaining unfair advantage and bringing the game into disrepute. Overrunning the goal line or touch line in attempt to play the ball is obviously allowed as part of the normal course of play. A player trying to get to the ball is allowed to go off the field of play to go around a defender near the touch line, assuming that he gets back into the field of play quickly and does not try to “hide” while out of the field of play. A player who is leaving the field constantly in the normal course of play should be warned that she needs to change her playing style or she may be cautioned for this misconduct.

If a child is hurt and goes to the coach, is there really a misconduct? How about an injured player who goes to the sideline to get out of the way? I doubt it in either case, especially in youth soccer. An attacker in an offside position is allowed to go off the field to signal to the referee that she is trying not to be involved in play.

A defender is not allowed to leave the field of play to try to put an attacker in an offside position. There is no offside, and the defender should be cautioned for trying to gain that unfair advantage. If a player goes off the field so the other team can’t see him, especially if he tries to move while “invisible” that is definitely trying to gain an unfair advantage and should be cautioned.

### **Entering or reentering the field of play**

This is also not a common misconduct in youth soccer. Any player who has left the field of play other than through the normal course of play, needs permission to enter the field. This could be an injured player, a bleeding player, or a player who had to correct his equipment. The bleeding player or the player correcting his equipment can only reenter the field at a stoppage of play, and must be inspected by the referee prior to play resuming. A player who has left the field of play to indicate that she does not want to be involved in an offside play, may only reenter the field when play has moved away from him, or upon signal by the referee. This is also the misconduct of a substitute who enters the field of play without permission of the referee.

### **Showing dissent in action or word**

This misconduct easily can happen in youth soccer. There is also the related send off offense of Offensive, Insulting, or Abusive Language and or Gestures. Showing descent is attacking the referee’s authority and therefore the integrity of the game, and if it is not dealt with, it can lead to loss of control of the match. Again this is an area of judgement. When is a “ref, I never touched him” descent? If the action is an attempt to intimidate you, then it is descent. If it just “jumped out” of the player’s mouth, and a verbal admonishment quiets the situation, what is the purpose of the misconduct? Here especially, misconduct is a tool for match control, not some burden. In youth soccer, part of our job as referee is to teach the players. A youth referee should never be unapproachable. For a player to question why you called “offsides” when a defender touched but did not control the ball is probably not descent. When you explain the need for the defender to control the ball, and the player does not accept it, then she could easily express descent. One of the things we need to teach players is self control. A player who kicks the ball in disgust because the referee called a foul, is probably showing descent in action and should be cautioned.

### **What actions lead to a send off, red card?**

Law 12 lists seven actions for which a send off may be issued. They are:

Offensive, insulting, or abusive language and or gestures  
Serious foul play  
Violent conduct

Denying the opposing team an obvious goal scoring opportunity by handling the ball  
Denying an opponent moving toward the goal an obvious goal scoring opportunity by any foul  
A second caution  
Spitting at an opponent or any other person

### **Serious foul play and violent conduct**

Serious foul play is probably the most common reason for a send off. This misconduct is often invoked for match control and to protect the safety of the other players. Proper early match control should make this call unnecessary, but not to use this weapon in your match control arsenal when it is needed, will bring retaliation and probably further injury.

While serious foul play is often violent, it does not have to be. The consequences of the misconduct must be serious to the players or the match. The two misconducts involving obvious goal scoring opportunities, were originally I.F.A. Board decisions about a type of serious foul play.

Serious foul play can only occur when the ball is in play. Violent conduct can occur anytime. Serious foul play happens as part of play on the ball. Similarly injurious actions off the ball would be violent conduct. Serious foul play can only be committed by a player. Anyone can commit violent conduct. Serious foul play is directed at an opponent. Violent conduct can be towards anyone. Serious foul play must be on the field of play and must involve a foul, normally one of the direct kick fouls. Violent conduct can occur anywhere.

Normally serious foul play or violent conduct involves violence or excessive force committed with the clear intention of injury. The I. F. A. Board tells us that referees must treat as serious foul play any tackle from behind which is dangerous. The only allowed discretion is determining if it was dangerous or not. If it was dangerous, it is a send off. Striking an opponent is normally either serious foul play or violent conduct. These kinds of actions have no place in soccer, especially youth soccer, and it is necessary to deal with them severely.

### **Spitting at an opponent or any other person**

This has no place in soccer. It was originally a form of violent conduct, before it was given its own form of misconduct. If it is against an opponent, it is a direct kick foul and a send off. It would be rare to wait until a stoppage in play to deal with this misconduct, it should normally be handled immediately.

### **Denying the opposing team an obvious goal scoring opportunity by handling the ball and denying an opponent moving toward the goal an obvious goal scoring opportunity by any offense punishable by a free kick or a penalty kick**

These are send off offenses because of the serious consequences on the match. Soccer is about scoring more goals than the other team. It is not like basketball where there are dozens and dozens of obvious scoring opportunities in a game. In soccer, obvious scoring opportunities are rare, and denying one can easily change the outcome of the match.

The first question is what is an obvious goal scoring opportunity? As with most interpretations of the law this is in the opinion of the referee, but there are guidelines. The first is distance from the goal. The further away from the goal the less likely there is an obvious goal scoring opportunity. But there is no requirement that the action occur in the penalty area. There are many obvious goal scoring opportunities where the ball and opponent are outside the penalty area. The number of players between the opponent or the ball and the goal is critical. If there is only one or no defenders to stop the goal, then it is probably an obvious goal scoring opportunity. Does the attacking player have clear possession of the ball? If the attacker and defender are both going for the ball, there is probably not an obvious goal scoring opportunity. If the attacker has just beaten the defender and only has to beat the goalkeeper, when that beaten defender fouls the attacker from behind, it probably was an obvious goal scoring opportunity.

In the case of a foul other than handling the ball, there is the requirement that the player be moving towards the goal. If the player is only moving in the direction of the opponent's goal line, as in a run down the wing with a later cross or cut to the goal, then the requirements of this misconduct are not met.

In the non-handling case, the offense which denies the goal does not have to be a foul. An obvious goal scoring opportunity could be denied by a misconduct committed on the field by a player. Here is such a situation. A player has a break away. As he is going to kick the ball a defender behind him shouts loudly and startles the player and he misses the shot. If the referee thinks that it was the shout which caused the missed shot, then that misconduct (unsporting behavior) denied an obvious goal scoring opportunity. The offending player should be sent off, and the restart should be an indirect free kick. In such a case the player would not be shown a yellow card first, since the referee should only punish the more serious send-off offense.

A player off the field of play cannot commit this misconduct since the restart would be a dropped ball, not a free kick. Also this misconduct can only be committed by players, not substitutes or team officials. Misconduct by a substitute or team official cannot result in a free kick, only a dropped ball. A send off or dismissal for these persons for such an offense would have to be for violent conduct. It is also possible that a caution for unsporting behavior could be issued.

The technical foul of the goalkeeper deliberately handling the ball after being kicked by a teammate cannot normally lead to either of these send off misconducts involving denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity. The misconduct involving handling specifically excludes the goalkeeper within her penalty area. Also, how could a ball deliberately kicked to the goalkeeper create an obvious goal scoring opportunity for the opponent? If it created this opportunity, why did the goalkeeper's teammate deliberately put the ball there? How could such a kick be "to the goalkeeper?" How could the attacker have sufficient possession to have this be an opportunity for an obvious goal, if the goalkeeper could play the ball? This last consideration makes it difficult to imagine how a goalkeeper in his penalty area could commit this misconduct by handling a throw-in from a teammate.

Here are some examples you might see.

A defender deliberately handles the ball on the goal line to prevent a goal. If the defender handles the ball but it still goes in the goal, the goal counts and she is cautioned for unsporting behavior. It is only a send off if the goal is actually denied. Here is an interesting variation. The defender prevents the goal by deliberately handling the ball. The ball goes to another (or the same) attacker, and before the referee decides to stop play, the attacker scores. The referee should allow the advantage, the goal should stand, and the defender should be sent off for denying the original goal scoring opportunity.

A goalkeeper lunges for the ball and handles it outside his penalty area to prevent a breakaway. He is guilty of a send off offense. Now if he had tackled the ball inside the penalty area, and slide outside the penalty area while still holding the ball, there could be a direct kick foul, but no send off. There was no obvious goal scoring opportunity, since the goalkeeper had possession of the ball before the foul was committed.

A beaten goalkeeper trips the attacker going for a free ball in front of the goal with no other defenders there to beat the attacker to the ball.

An attacker has a breakaway on the goalkeeper, and a defender trips him from behind.

### **Offensive, insulting, or abusive language and or gestures**

This is fairly obvious. It is matter of personal tolerance. There is no need for the referee to take abuse or allow a player or anyone to abuse someone else. It can easily be a matter of match

control if it is not handled. Is an expletive heard by few and directed at no one in particular, which jumps out of an immediately apologetic youth, a send off misconduct? Probably not.

### **A second caution**

This is also fairly obvious. A player who receives a second yellow card, is then immediately shown a red card and is sent off. There is no requirement that the player be shown the first yellow card before he commits the second cautionable offense. For example, a player commits a cautionable offense, but the referee decides not to stop play, but to wait for a stoppage to give the caution. Before the stoppage, that same player commits another cautionable offense. It was probably a bad decision on the referee's part not to stop play for the caution, but if he wants to issue both cautions and send off the player, he may. In this case where the two cautions and the send off are issued at once, the two cautionable offenses must be clearly distinct actions. To issue two cautions for what is essentially one act, such as unsporting behavior and entering the field of play without permission, is not what is meant by this send off offense.

### **What is the discipline for a misconduct?**

There are only two types of discipline for players and substitutes, depending on the form of the misconduct. There are cautions, yellow cards, and send offs, red cards. The cards are only shown to players and substitutes for misconduct which occurs during a match. If the misconduct occurs before the match, the cards are not shown, but the misconduct is recorded, and both teams informed of the cautions or send-offs. Anyone who is sent off, may not return, must leave the area of the field. If a player is sent off, after play had begun, she may not be replaced. Her team must play short-handed for the rest of the match. If a person was a player at the end of the first half and is sent off at half time, the team must play short-handed.

Law five clearly gives the referee the authority to discipline misconduct by team officials. The referee may speak to the person giving an unofficial admonishment, or may dismiss him. In neither case is the person shown a yellow or red card. In the latter case the person must leave the vicinity of the match and may not return during the match. The dismissal of a team official must be recorded in the referee's match report.

The referee may deal with misconduct of others such as spectators by invoking the right to stop, suspend or terminate the match for outside interference. He may suspend the match until the person guilty of the misconduct leaves the vicinity of the match, or terminate the match if he doesn't. Again cards are not shown, and the only official action is dismissal and or termination of the match.

Normally the referee issues the misconduct to a player or substitute by:

Separating the offending player from the rest of the group while keeping the other players in his sight and without making physical contact with the player.

Obtaining the needed information, player name, and number.

Explaining to the player the offense and if it is a send off, the fact that he must leave the vicinity of the match.

Taking out the correct card, and extending his arm above his head in the direction of the offending player. If this is the player's second caution the referee shows the yellow card immediately followed by the red card

Recording the information (player, specific misconduct, time) on the referee's match record.

If it is a send off, the referee sees that the player leaves the area of the field.

The referee restarts the match as soon as possible.

There are times when the referee needs to remove the player from the field as soon as possible, This would often be the case for serious foul play or violent conduct where retaliation and further misconduct is possible. In that case, the referee:

Shows the player the card immediately.

Sees that the player leaves the area of the field.

Records the needed data.

Restarts the match as soon as possible.

The referee needs to fill out a Referee Game Misconduct Report detailing the circumstances of the misconduct including dismissal of team officials or other persons. This should be given to the Regional Referee Administrator.

**What is the restart after a misconduct?**

If the ball was out of play when the misconduct occurred, then the misconduct does not alter the restart. If the play was stopped for a foul as well as the misconduct on the same team, the restart is that for the foul.

If play was stopped for a misconduct by a player on the field of play, the restart is an indirect kick for the other team. If play was stopped for a misconduct by a player off the field of play, the restart is a dropped ball from where the ball was when play was stopped. If play was stopped for misconduct of a substitute, team official, or outside agent (spectator) then the restart is also a dropped ball.

Play does not have to be stopped for a misconduct, except when a substitute enters the field illegally. If play is not stopped, the misconduct must be issued at the next stoppage of play. In this case, the misconduct does not affect the restart.

**Summary**

Law 12 should give a referee a good idea of what is considered fair or unfair in soccer. The various aspects of the law should be seen as weapons in the referee's arsenal of match control, not as some burdensome rules to enforce. Proper enforcement of this law, more than any other of soccer's laws, depends upon the judgment of the referee. All of the fouls and misconducts demand that in the opinion of the referee certain qualitative requirements occurred. In this respect the referee cannot be wrong no matter what the opinions of others are.

The bottom line is that it is the job of the referee to allow the match to be fair, safe, and fun. As the players become older, fairness becomes most important. If the referee does not use his authority to create and maintain fairness, the players will try to create fairness through retaliation. In reality, retaliation not only hurts fairness, but safety and fun as well.



## LAW 12 – Fouls and Misconduct

Fouls and misconduct are penalized as follows:

### Direct Free Kick

**A direct free kick is awarded to the opposing team if a player commits any of the following six offenses in a manner considered by the referee to be careless, reckless or using excessive force:**

- \_ *kicks or attempts to kick an opponent*
- \_ *trips or attempts to trip an opponent*
- \_ *jumps at an opponent*
- \_ *charges an opponent*
- \_ *strikes or attempts to strike an opponent*
- \_ *pushes an opponent*

**A direct free kick is also awarded to the opposing team if a player commits any of the following four offenses:**

- \_ *tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball*
- \_ *holds an opponent*
- \_ *spits at an opponent*
- \_ *handles the ball deliberately (except for the goalkeeper within his own penalty area)*

**A direct free kick is taken from where the offense occurred. \* (see page 3)**

### Penalty Kick

A penalty kick is awarded if any of the above ten offenses is committed by a player inside his own penalty area, irrespective of the position of the ball, provided it is in play.

### Indirect Free Kick

**An indirect free kick is awarded to the opposing team if a goalkeeper, inside his own penalty area, commits any of the following five offenses:**

- \_ *takes more than six seconds while controlling the ball with his hands before releasing it from his possession*
- \_ *touches the ball again with his hands after it has been released from his possession and has not touched any other player*
- \_ *touches the ball with his hands after it has been deliberately kicked to him by a team-mate*
- \_ *touches the ball with his hands after he has received it directly from a throw-in taken by a team-mate*

**An indirect free kick is also awarded to the opposing team if a player, in the opinion of the referee:**

- \_ *plays in a dangerous manner*
- \_ *impedes the progress of an opponent*
- \_ *prevents the goalkeeper from releasing the ball from his hands*
- \_ *commits any other offense, not previously mentioned in Law 12, for which play is stopped to caution or dismiss a player*

**The indirect free kick is taken from where the offense occurred.\* (see page 3)**

### Disciplinary Sanctions

**Only a player or substitute or substituted player may be shown the red or yellow card.**

### Cautionable Offenses

**A player is cautioned and shown the yellow card if he commits any of the following seven offenses:**

1. is guilty of unsporting behavior
2. shows dissent by word or action
3. persistently infringes the Laws of the Game
4. delays the restart of play
5. fails to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a corner kick or free kick
6. enters or re-enters the field of play without the referee's permission
7. deliberately leaves the field of play without the referee's permission

### Sending-Off Offenses

**A player is sent off and shown the red card if he commits any of the following seven offenses:**

1. is guilty of serious foul play
2. is guilty of violent conduct
3. spits at an opponent or any other person
4. denies the opposing team a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity by deliberately handling the ball (this does not apply to a goalkeeper within his own penalty area)
5. denies an obvious goal-scoring opportunity to an opponent moving towards the player's goal by an offense punishable by a free kick or a penalty kick
6. uses offensive or insulting or abusive language and/or gestures
7. receives a second caution in the same match

**A player who has been sent off must leave the vicinity of the field of play and the technical area.**

## **Decisions of the International F.A. Board**

### **\_ Decision 1**

A player who commits a cautionable or sending-off offense, either on or off the field of play, whether directed towards an opponent, a team-mate, the referee, an assistant referee or any other person, is disciplined according to the nature of the offense committed.

### **\_ Decision 2**

The goalkeeper is considered to be in control of the ball by touching it with any part of his hand or arms. Possession of the ball includes the goalkeeper deliberately parrying the ball, but does not include the circumstances where, in the opinion of the referee, the ball rebounds accidentally from the goalkeeper, for example after he has made a save.

### **\_ Decision 3**

Subject to the terms of Law 12, a player may pass the ball to his own goalkeeper using his head or chest or knee, etc. If, however, in the opinion of the referee, a player uses a deliberate trick while the ball is in play in order to circumvent the Law, the player is guilty of unsporting behavior. He is cautioned, shown the yellow card and an

indirect free kick is awarded to the opposing team from the place where the infringement occurred. \* (see page 3) A player using a deliberate trick to circumvent the Law while he is taking a free kick, is cautioned for unsporting behavior and shown the yellow card. The free kick is retaken. In such circumstances, it is irrelevant

whether the goalkeeper subsequently touches the ball with his hands or not. The offense is committed by the player in attempting to circumvent both the letter and the spirit of Law 12.

### **\_ Decision 4**

A tackle from behind, which endangers the safety of an opponent, must be sanctioned as serious foul play.

### **\_ Decision 5**

Any simulating action anywhere on the field, which is intended to deceive the referee, must be sanctioned as unsporting behavior.