

JOE KNOWS AYSO

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Joe Eldridge, National Referee Administrator

AYSO frequently receives questions regarding rules, regulations, policies, interpretation of FIFA Law and AYSO modifications. In my position as National Referee Administrator, I am often asked to respond. The following are some of the interesting questions I recently received. If you have questions, please contact me, Joe Eldridge, at (888) 686-2976 or by e-mail at joeeldridge@ayso.org.

Question:

Joe, I am a Regional Referee Administrator and every season our older divisions play in an Area schedule, often against much stronger teams. Is there an AYSO guideline or publication which deals with how to best control a runaway score, and is there any established AYSO mercy rule that you know of? Thank you. Ed

Answer:

Hi Ed,

Thank you for your question, I have heard it before. AYSO does not have a "Mercy Rule". In any competition, there is the chance that the score will be lopsided. We do not think mercy rules that end a game prematurely are appropriate because a major part of sport for the players is enjoying the process of playing - not just who ultimately wins. We believe that mercy rules send the wrong message to players. The message we prefer to send is "keep on trying" - not to give up because it is difficult. If mercy rules were used we would not have the joy of experiencing some of the great "come from behind" or "gallant underdog effort" experiences.

Some teams or coaches may "ease up" against a weaker team by "packing the defense", playing less attack oriented players in attacking positions, playing "one touch" or "two touch", or similar tactics. Even this may lead to a negative result and hard feelings, if done in a way that disrespects the opposing team or taunts the opponents.

"It ain't over till the fat lady sings" is an expression often heard in athletics as is the sentiment that "you only get better by playing better teams". Losing, when dealt with appropriately, builds character and resolve to improve. Mercy rules build a willingness to give up early.

I have played on and coached teams which "got our clocks cleaned" and teams that dominated some games. In both cases we tried to enjoy the process, learn and improve and always demonstrate good sportsmanship regardless of the score.

Referees should not interfere with games because of lopsided scores. Unsporting behavior, on the other hand, is a reason for referee interference. It is a player's game and they should be given the full playing time to enjoy the process and learn what they can from the experience.

Good luck Ed and please do what you can to discourage the use of "Mercy Rules".

Question:

Joe, I have a question regarding a U12 Game where I was an assistant referee. The Center Referee was not sure of the call, and made no call, but none of us were sure if she was correct or incorrect.

The instance: The left forward was coming in fast with the ball. The keeper challenged the attacking player by running in, sliding feet first, and trapping the ball with his arms. The attacker fell over the keeper's feet in the same manner as a player being slide tackled. As there is no slide tackling allowed at this age, normally a foul would be called. However, as this was the Keeper, is this considered a slide tackle, or just aggressive goalkeeper play?

Any advice you can give would be greatly appreciated. Thanks, Edward.

Answer:

Hi Edward,

The situation you have described and are seeking clarification about is complicated by the fact that your region has a rule which is not consistent with FIFA or AYSO. According to FIFA and AYSO, sliding tackles can be done legally, so making a local rule that says they are illegal presents problems.

A sliding tackle is an attempt to dispossess the opponent from the ball while sliding to tackle the ball with the feet. If this is not allowed in your region then I would assume it would apply to goalkeepers as well as field players, unless you are going to make another rule that makes this exception. If you are going to make the exception rule for goalkeepers, then you need to explain how and under what conditions the goalkeeper can slide tackle legally. If you are going to allow the goalkeeper to slide tackle legally, then a field player should have the same right and that will get back to the point where some slide tackles are legal and some are illegal which is exactly the current situation under FIFA and AYSO and would make your no sliding tackle rule unnecessary.

Judging whether or not a slide tackle is legal or not involves the referee determining the manner in which the tackle is executed. A fair tackle which plays the ball first and is not careless, reckless or done with excessive force should be allowed whether done by a field player or a goalkeeper. It is more difficult for me to imagine a goalkeeper using a sliding tackle to prevent a goal or a shot because they generally dive or slide head first using their hands to contact the ball rather than feet first using their feet to contact the ball.

It is important to understand that it is the referee who must judge whether or not an infraction of the Law has occurred that deserves penalizing and I do not presume to second guess the judgment of a referee in a match I did not witness. It is impossible for me to determine if the referee's decision was consistent with the Laws or not as I can envision situations where what you have described could be legal and situations where it would be illegal.

Well Ed, I hope I have given you reason to reconsider your no sliding tackle rule. Good luck.

Question:

Joe, this past weekend one of our referees shortened both halves in a U-19 game by 5 minutes without telling anyone of his plan to do so. Naturally, both coaches complained as this game ended in a tie, and both teams would have benefited from a win in order to make the play-offs. He told me the match started late due to the goals not being set up in time and he wanted to make sure that the following match could start on time.

My question is: should this match be re-played in its entirety? There does not seem to be anything in the laws which addresses a referee's arbitrary decision to shorten the match without informing (and getting an approval from) the participants. Can you please shed some light on this? Thank you, Albert

Answer:

Hi Albert, this is a situation where the "governing body" (the Regional Board) should establish "competition rules" in advance. Sometimes the "competition rules" provide for these kinds of adjustments. For example, in tournaments with lots of teams scheduled to play over the course of an extended period, matches must end on time to keep everything on schedule and therefore cannot be extended to add on time lost for injury etc. Also, sometimes Regions have similar time constraints for their regular season matches and may have established some "competition rules" that restrict the completion of the full playing time in certain instances.

There should be an advance understanding of these special circumstances regarding the length of matches and whether or not time can be extended beyond a certain point. In the absence of advance notification of specific "competition rules" the referee should be following the FIFA Laws of the Game and allow the full playing time to be completed. According to FIFA Law, "An abandoned match is replayed (in full) unless the competition rules provide otherwise."

Thanks Albert and check with your local Regional Commissioner and Regional Referee Administrator to see if any such "competition rules" were issued in advance.