

## JOE KNOWS AYSO Spring 2006

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](mailto:joeeldridge@ayso.org).

### **Question:**

Dear Joe,

My son just started playing AYSO soccer and seems to enjoy it quite a lot. I want to learn more about soccer so I can support my son's efforts to learn the game. I'm a typical sports fan and am more familiar with sports such as football, baseball and basketball. I'm puzzled by a variety of things that seem different in soccer from what I am used to in other sports. Why is it that spectators are given very little information by soccer referees? Why don't referees explain things more to coaches and spectators about the fouls and who committed them. How does anyone know how much time is left to play when the referee seems to be able to add on more time if he wants to. Why can't coaches call time outs to help their teams make adjustments?

Thanks,

Tim

### **Answer:**

Hi Tim,

Thanks for your questions and thank you for supporting you son as he enjoys the AYSO experience and he and you learn about the beautiful game of soccer.

Soccer is different from many popular American sports in some rather significant ways. Basically, many American sports are designed as coach's games which allow considerable coach participation and accommodate frequent stoppages so officials can confer and spectators and coaches can be informed. Indeed, it is not uncommon in some popular American sports for considerably more time to be spent waiting for officials to make decisions and to inform spectators about those decisions than is actually spent playing the games.

Soccer, on the other hand, is designed primarily as a player's game and interference in the game by coaches and officials is intentionally minimized. The AYSO National Rules and Regulations contains the following quote taken from an earlier edition of the Laws of the Game (Rules of Soccer) which best expresses the spirit of the game and the philosophy of refereeing:

*The Laws of the Game 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 feelings and loss of temper on the part of the players and spoils the pleasure of spectators.*

Additionally, soccer referees are authorized to not call an infraction if the team that was fouled would have more of an advantage if play was not stopped. The Laws of the Game direct the referee to...

*“allow play to continue when the team against which an offence has been committed will benefit from such an advantage...”*

Fundamentally, soccer officials are expected to enforce the spirit behind the Laws of the Game and not simply enforce the letter of the Laws. Although these concepts may be foreign to those not familiar with soccer, understanding that the spirit of the game and the philosophy of refereeing intend for the game to maximize playing time for the players and to minimize interruptions by coaches and officials, should, at least, help you and your son understand why it differs from some other sports.

To more directly answer your questions, I offer you the following:

1. Fouls fall into two categories; ones that result in a direct free kick for the opponents (may score directly) and indirect free kicks (a second player must touch or play the ball before a goal can be scored). There are lots of different kinds of fouls that fall into these two categories but all you need to know is which kind is it. This is easily recognized because the referee will hold his/her arm up in the air to indicate an indirect free kick. If his/her arm isn't held up, the kick is direct.
2. If players are guilty of misconduct, the referee will hold up a yellow card to indicate the player has been officially cautioned that any further misconduct will result in the player be dismissed (sent off) from the field. When the referee holds up a red card, this means the player is being dismissed (sent off) and can no longer participate in the game. In addition, this player's team must now play with one less player on the field.
3. The length of the game is specified and varies with the different youth age groups. Because the Laws of the Game want to maximize the playing time for players, the referee is allowed to add on time and the end of the game for any time he/she feels was lost due to injury, substitution, a team wasting time or any other cause. In many other sports, the referee accomplishes the same thing by “stopping the clock”.
4. There are no “time outs” in soccer because it is designed as a game which has very few interruptions. Coaches cannot call time outs in soccer as this would interfere with the game and with player's playing time. All good soccer coaches know that practice is the time for coaches to coach and games are the time for players to play.

These are just a few suggestions to help you and your son to get started with enjoying the most popular sport on earth. As with any sport, the more you understand the game, the more you can appreciate the beauty of the game and it's more subtle aspects. I would suggest you attend some basic coach and referee training courses where you will pick up lots of additional useful information and knowledge.

It's a great game and AYSO is a great organization. Enjoy the ride.

Thanks,

Joe

**Question:**

Dear Joe,

This past weekend at a soccer game a keeper jumped into the air to catch a ball to keep from being scored on. An offensive player jumped either on purpose or by accident into the keeper which made them both lose their footing. Another offensive player kicked the ball in for a goal. I have read the Laws of the Game and the Guidance for Referees and Coaches. I don't see where it specifically states the particulars on charging, impeding, or holding against a keeper. It seems obvious to me but there is much disagreement about just how far an offensive player can go to get the ball in. The books talk about not impeding the keeper when they are trying to get rid of the ball but is not clear on what many deem as not only a safety issue but an issue of fair play. I would think that making body contact while the ball is in the air is not O.K. For that matter, what about the offensive player who kicks the keeper while the keeper is or is not in possession (touching the ball with their hand or arm). I believe this happens most often accidentally, but it does happen. Please help me to help my people understand. We do tell our U-10 players not to kick the ball if the keeper is going for the ball. We feel that at this age their level of coordination and judgment is not developed enough to decide when a close call becomes unsafe. We don't want anyone to lose their teeth.

Thank you for your time,

Alyson

**Answer:**

Hi Alyson,

Thank you for your interesting questions. There are facts of the Law to consider and there is the judgment of the referee to consider. The Laws of the Game state:

*“Football is a competitive sport and physical contact between players is a normal and acceptable part of the game, however players must play within the Laws and respect the principles of fair play.”*

Opposing players are allowed to challenge one another for the ball and contact with one-another is often unavoidable. Opposing players are allowed to both jump to gain control of the ball and may collide with each other in this attempt or players may charge an opponent (shoulder to shoulder) to bump them off the ball or an attacking player may try to kick a ball the goalkeeper is trying to gain control of with his/her hands. These are all legal provided the referee does not consider them to be careless, reckless or done with excessive force. Referee judgment obviously is critical in the interpretation and application of the spirit behind the Laws and the duty of the referee to penalize only deliberate breaches of the Law and to avoid penalizing trifling or doubtful offenses.

The judgment of referees may differ in different situations and this is understandable. What all referees strive for and coaches and spectators would like to see is consistency of interpretation and application among referees. However, given that human judgment varies and the nature of the way soccer is designed to be refereed, controversy is inevitable. Generally, the younger the players the quicker the referee is to interfere and stop play for the safety of the young players who are still learning. As players gain in

experience and age, referees generally allow more physical play provided it is within the bounds of fair play.

I hope this provides you with a measure of understanding. The best way to ensure the referee interprets the Laws as you would like to see them interpreted is to actually be the referee. As a referee myself, there were even times when, in hindsight, I didn't agree with my own decisions, so it isn't a perfect science.

Thanks,

Joe