

JOE KNOWS AYSO

Winter 2005

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,

This weekend two players on my team were seriously injured, and three others were knocked out of the game for a period of time. The action that caused these injuries and the response of the referee made me consider that maybe AYSO needs to have its own decision and interpretation of one of the Laws.

Law 12 states that a player should be cautioned if he "persistently infringes the Laws of the Game." I think that AYSO should expand this to state, a player should be cautioned if "he or HIS TEAM persistently infringes the Laws of the Game." Also we should add that a player may be sent off if, "he infringes a Law of the game after any player on his team has been cautioned for the same offense".

During the game our opponents implemented a tactic that if one of our forwards got past their defender, the defender would intentionally trip our player. Once a player was verbally warned or cautioned by the referee, their coach would simply move that player to a different position on the field and replace him with another player that continued to implement this tactic. The referee called fouls and even cautioned two of their players for tripping, but since the coach kept moving them once they were cautioned, none of their players was sent off and he continued to employ this tactic throughout the game. The referee seemed unable to stop their actions.

The reason this type of wording is not needed in professional soccer is that because of limited substitution and player specialization a professional coach cannot employ this tactic without risking having a player sent off. But AYSO players are more versatile which gives an AYSO coach more chances to substitute for or move players around reducing the risk of a player getting a second caution.

Several of my friends who are referees (Advanced and National) said that a good referee would have recognized this tactic and started cautioning players for every tripping foul. However, since the team had 18 players that would mean that they would get 20 or more trips before any player would have been given a second caution. As it was, there were only 17 tripping fouls called during the game so they would still have been home free.

I think that the only way to resolve this situation is to have AYSO recognize a TEAM CAUTION, and once one player is cautioned for "persistently infringes the Laws of the Game", the next player who intentionally commits that same foul should be Sent Off!!

This has not been an isolated incident. I have seen this tactic employed 5 times in the last four years and have had two other players seriously injured during these games.

We played this team twice this year and they employed this tactic both times; luckily none of the players was seriously injured in the first game.

Dennis

Answer:

Thank you for your question Dennis and I'm sorry that players on your team were injured and hope they recover soon.

There is no need for additional AYSO rules or modifications to the FIFA Laws. The tactic you have described is sometimes referred to as "rotational fouling" and should be dealt with as persistent infringement. USSF has produced an excellent CD ROM presentation on "Persistent Infringement" which makes it clear that in certain circumstances even a single foul may be considered as persistent infringement and a caution given if preceded by a pattern of similar fouls. The tactic you have described can easily be stopped by the referee making it known to both teams that he considers this tactic a serious violation and if it continues will be dealt with accordingly.

The referee is the sole judge of whether or not an infraction is serious enough to rise to the level of meriting sending off. If the referee considers, for example, a tripping foul to be serious foul play, he should send the player off. It is the referee alone who must "read the game" and decide whether or not, for the good of the game and safety of the players, the infraction is serious foul play requiring the player to be sent off.

Referees have all the tools necessary to manage the game. They simply must be willing to use the tools. Unsporting tactics are not prevented by making more rules – they are prevented by referees taking appropriate action. Law 5 authorizes the referee to control the match. If the spirit of the game or spirit behind the Laws of the Game is being violated, the referee should take action to stop it and explain the reasoning behind his decisions later, if necessary, in the game report. It is the job of the governing body (regional board) to review the facts and determine if any additional action is necessary.

A rose is a rose by any other name and so is the blatant disregard for fair play and sporting behavior. Encourage your referees to do what, in their hearts, they know is right and let the board determine if justice was served.

Thank you for taking the time to express your opinions and for seeking solutions to serious problems. I'll be more than happy to speak with anyone about this issue so please have them contact me if they have questions.

Thanks.

Question:

Joe, does AYSO have a policy about lightning? If so, what is it and is it documented somewhere? If not, why doesn't AYSO National clearly state its position on lightning safety during practices and games?

Scott

Answer:

Hi Scott,

Thank you for your question regarding AYSO's position on lightning safety.

The National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL) currently recommends that all individuals should leave the game site and reach a safe structure or location when lightning is within 6 miles.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Lightning Safety Guidelines indicate that since lightning can strike out of a clear blue sky as far away as ten miles from a rain storm, when the “Flash-to-Bang” count is thirty seconds or less, everyone should leave the game site to a safe location.

The United States Soccer Federation (USSF) position is that if you can hear thunder you are within reach of lightning and that referees must protect the safety of all participants by stopping game activities quickly, so that participants and spectators may retire to a safer place before the lightning threat becomes significant. Applying the 30-30 rule is recommended and to wait thirty minutes or more after hearing the last thunder before leaving shelter.

In view of the above, the position of the AYSO National Referee Commission regarding electrical storms, as stated in the AYSO publication “Guidance for Referees and Coaches”, is:

“It is said that lightning can strike out of a clear blue sky within a radius of ten or more miles from an electrical storm. It is therefore strongly recommended that practices and games be terminated immediately upon hearing thunder or seeing lightning.”

I hope this helps. Just remember:

“If you can see it - flee it; if you can hear it – clear it.”