

JOE KNOWS AYSO Winter 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.

Question:

Dear Joe,

I enjoyed your column in the Soccer Now magazine. Maybe you can point me to the FIFA Law I need to examine or another reference to better understand foul recognition. As a U-10 ref I like to keep the flow of the game uninterrupted and know that mere physical contact is not a foul in most cases. But there seems too wide a "gray area" for the ref's discretion. What are the defining features of a typical or "classic" foul?

Thank you,
Guven

Answer:

Hi Guven,

Thanks for your question regarding foul recognition. Defining the features of a "typical" or "classic" foul would be very useful for decisions in the "gray areas". Attempts have been made to help referees, in this regard, through training sessions which include the viewing of fouls in actual game footage. Tapes are available such as "The Gray Areas", "Foul Play", "Dealing With Foul Play", and "Fouls and Misconduct" to name a few but unfortunately these attempts have primarily centered around professional level play. Applying the standards used at the professional level to youth matches is not always appropriate. This is why referees are continually seeking to improve their ability to apply the "Spirit of the Laws" as appropriate for different situations and different age levels.

The ultimate aim of all good referees is to achieve an appropriate balance between the flow of the game and control of the game. When just the right balance is achieved, an enjoyable match for all concerned is the result. By-the-way, when the referee achieves this balance, the referee will have managed the match so well that his or her presence is hardly noticed. So I guess the ultimate compliment for the referee is when most don't even notice or remember the referee was there.

"In the opinion of the referee" is a phrase you will find in the Laws of the Game. The Laws do not tell you what your opinion should be but expect you to interpret and apply the Laws with wisdom, authority, and compassion. An observation I have often made which may help in your quest for understanding is that, "If it is your opinion that is required, you can't be wrong!" Others may have differing opinions but the Laws do not ask for the consensus opinion they only ask for the referee's opinion.

Your quest for defining the typical foul is a worthy quest for all referees. The answer is elusive and the more we try to pin it down the more we begin to understand that there

are no hard and fast standards or rules and that each situation is different and requires the referee to make a decision based on their interpretation and understanding of the "Spirit of the Game" and the "Philosophy of Refereeing".

Thanks,
Joe

Question:

Dear Joe,

I have a question about a Dangerous Play situation that has generated some debate. The situation, in a high level U16 game, is as follows:

A defender running back toward his own goal, a few steps ahead of an attacker, is in pursuit of a lofted, bounding ball. The defender, upon reaching a position to do so, kicks high -- mid chest -- to send the ball back up field over his shoulder. The attacker makes contact with the defender. The contact is not severe but it is the attacker's front chest (AYSO logo area) meeting the shoulder blade area of the defender.

At the moment of player to player contact, the ball had just left the defender's foot. The ball came near the attacker's face as it headed back up field. The attacker pulled up (flinched) slightly.

Had the attacker not pulled up and continued the run to the ball unabated his run might have resulted in an "excessive force" contact into the back of the defender. It might also have resulted in the attacker making contact with the upraised foot of the defender.

The referee thinks, "Did the attacker pull up because of the raised foot, because of impending contact with the defender's back, because the ball was coming at his face, or because he recognized that the ball was going behind him?"

Question 1: Is the "high kick" dangerous play by definition because the attacker pulled up rather than run through the defender. "The attacker has an absolute right to play the ball with his chest and the act of the defender lifting his foot to play the ball while only a step ahead made him veer off to avoid injury."

Question 2: Since the attacker came from behind the defender and attempted to run through the defender, who had pulled up to play the ball, did the attacker commit a dangerous act? (As when a player attempts to head a low ball that is being kicked?)

Question 3: If the ball had not been played, the defender could clearly have been seen to be shielding a ball within playing distance. Is the attacker's contact with the defender a charging foul because contact was not shoulder to shoulder but rather chest to back?

Question 4: Does it matter that the kicking foot was opposite shoulder from the player contact and thus that the attacker needed to run through the defender to get to the ball or to be in a position where the foot was near his face?

Question 5: Does it matter that it was a U16 game instead of, say, a U14 or U19 game? More skilled verses less skilled players?

Thank you,
Gus

Answer:

Hi Gus,

Thank you for your questions regarding Dangerous Play. Dangerous Play mostly involves the judgment of the referee in determining whether or not the action of the player causes undue danger to an opponent. These situations are difficult to discuss in writing, as we each may visualize different things.

In the situation you describe and the resulting questions asked, there is no definite answer since each requires the judgment of the referee. If the referee judges that the action of the player attempting to kick the ball was reasonable and the nearby opponent "pulled up" and "flinched" then no infraction has occurred. There are many times in a game, when a player may "pull up" or "flinch" in self protection that are caused by normal play where no infraction has occurred.

On the other hand, if the referee judges that the action of the player attempting to kick the ball was unreasonable and endangered the safety of a nearby opponent, then dangerous play should be called. If the kick was high enough to endanger the opponent who was attempting to play the ball on his chest then this should be called Dangerous Play.

If the player elects to shield the ball rather than kick it, then the opponent has the right to legally charge the shielding player provided the elements of the charge are legal; i.e. shoulder to shoulder or shoulder to shoulder blade, etc.

Certainly the age/skill of the players will influence the referee's decisions. Generally the younger the players the quicker the referee should be to intervene in the interest of player education and safety.

I hope this helps,
Joe

Question:

Joe, in a U-12 girl's game during a goal kick, the player places the ball in the goal area to restart. After everyone sets up for the kick, she picks up the ball, runs too other side of goal area, replaces the ball and kicks it into play. Is that allowed or considered poor sportsmanship or time wasting?

Thanks,
Ron

Answer:

Hi Ron,

Thank you for your question. The situation you describe is perfectly legal unless the referee feels that an unusual amount of time was wasted in relocating the ball. The ball may be placed and replaced anywhere within the goal area for a goal kick and is not considered in play until it has been kicked beyond the penalty area without it being touched or played by any other player prior to leaving the penalty area.

The kicker is allowed to adjust placement of the ball and even change his/her mind and place it somewhere else in the goal area but if the referee feels that the player is intentionally delaying the restart then the player may be cautioned and time added. If a Caution is given, the restart following the caution will still be a goal kick for the same team.

I hope this is the information you need.

Thanks,
Joe