

An ICCL Fan's Guide to the Laws of Soccer

With the increasing popularity of soccer in the United States, many fans have become familiar with the rules (referred to as "laws" by most soccer federations) which govern its play. Other fans may be very new to the game, but even long-time fans at least occasionally wonder why certain behaviors are considered fouls and others are not, why there are so many kinds of restarts, why sometimes one team can send in substitutes but the other team cannot, and so on. In order to help fans both understand and appreciate the game, the ICCL in conjunction with the referee crews offer this brief introduction to the laws.

Offsides

This aspect of the game can be confusing to say the least. To begin with, offside is only slightly related to the place on the field at which it occurs. The line demarcating the offside position is determined by either the second to last defender or the ball. If an attacker is farther downfield than whichever of those markers is closer to the goal line, that attacker is in the offside position. The player would not be called for offsides, however, until the ball is played to him or her by a teammate ("involved in active play"). It is extremely difficult to make the offsides call unless one is in just the right position on the field, which is why assistant referees (or referees in a two-person system) are constantly moving up and down the sidelines. Although there are a few more nuances to the law, the last thing for most fans to keep in mind is that a person cannot be offsides on a throw-in, goal kick, corner kick, or on their own defensive half of the field.

Dangerous Play

In higher levels of play, more stringent conditions must be met for dangerous play to be called. In the ICCL, only two conditions need be present:

- The play is dangerous to someone (including the player committing the action)
- It is committed with another player nearby

High kicks are the most common form of dangerous play, but it can also be dangerous to try to kick the ball while on the ground, to try to head the ball below the waist, or to turn one's back into the play. The skill level of the players has a great deal of bearing on the judgment of dangerousness.

In keeping with current trends in youth sports, the threat of concussion is taken very seriously. In the 5th/6th grade division, deliberately heading the ball is considered dangerous play.

Handling

The rule of thumb for determining deliberate handling is whether "the hand plays the ball" (is handling) or "the ball plays the hand" (not handling). There are many, in fact, most, instances when the ball comes in contact with a player's hand or arm which do not warrant the whistle. If the player could have avoided touching the ball, his or her arm was not in a normal playing position, or the player gains an advantage from the way

the hand or arm reacted to the contact, along with motions that are clearly deliberate (like catching the ball or picking it up from the ground), then handling will be called.

Observations on calls and no-calls in the game of soccer

Most of the time when no call is made, regardless of how the situation appeared from the sidelines, it is because there was no foul. Soccer is a contact sport, and under completely legal circumstances, players fall, fly, and tumble, though the laws are intended to minimize injury. Sometimes, however, a foul is committed but no call is made:

- Advantage. The referee allows play to continue if calling a foul takes away an advantage from the team against which the foul was committed. Usually, but not always, advantage would only be signaled if there is an immediate goal-scoring opportunity.
- Trifling Infractions. When the committing of a foul has no significant impact on play, for example when a player is elbowed but does not lose control of the ball or appear hurt, it is within the spirit of the laws not to blow the whistle.
- Offsetting Fouls. Unlike most other sports, the simultaneous occurrence of fouls by players from opposing teams is not a cause for calling either foul, as long as the fouls are of equal and low severity. For example, when two players are charging each other illegally with approximately equal force, play will likely be continued unless the charges are of a violent nature.
 - Note that, as a fan/parent, it is human nature for a person to see only the foul against one's own child or teammate, and not see that both players are fouling each other. The referee has to judge whether the conditions are offsetting.

Throw-ins

For a throw-in to be legal, the thrower

- has both feet on the ground outside the touch line
- holds the ball with both hands
- delivers the ball from behind and over the head
- delivers the ball into the field of play

Substitutions

Both teams may substitute on goal kicks, after goals, and between periods. A team can substitute on their own throw-in and on the other team's throw-in if the other team is also substituting. Neither team may substitute on a corner kick (although high school rules allow it). Both teams may also substitute when a player is replaced for an injury or is cautioned.