

UNITED STATES
SOCCER FEDERATION

Julie Ilacqua, Chair, Referee Committee
Vincent Mauro, Director of Officials



Memorandum 1997

Alfred P. Kleinaitis
Manager of Referee Development and Education

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The 111th meeting of the International Football Association Board (IFAB) in Belfast on March 1, 1997, resulted not only in a number of amendments to the Laws but also in approval of a modernized version of the previous wording and layout. Circular 612 (April 7, 1997) addresses these amendments.

The amendments discussed below are effective as of July 1, 1997, for all affiliated leagues, associations, officials, and competitions. They are to be implemented for all season schedules and tournaments commencing on or after that date. They may not be implemented prior to that date except by special permission of the Federation.

Since the rewriting of the Laws approved by the IFAB is extensive, a subsequent Memorandum will be issued later in 1997 by the Federation to bring these changes to the attention of the soccer community.

1. MAIN AMENDMENTS TO THE LAWS OF THE GAME

Law 4 (Players' Equipment)

"If thermal shorts are worn, they are of the same main color as the shorts." USSF Advice to Referees: this issue was substantially raised in Circular 459 (1991) which dealt with visible undergarments. If player shorts are multi-colored, the undergarment must match the dominant color.

Law 5 (The Referee)

"ensures that any player bleeding from a wound leaves the field of play." USSF Advice to Referees: this issue was substantially raised in Circular 438 (1990) which dealt with observed bleeding. The presumption is that the player must not only leave the field but may not be permitted to return unless and until the bleeding is stopped. In any event, such a player may only return to the field on receiving a signal from the Referee.

Law 8 (The Start and Restart of Play)

"and the team which wins the toss decides which goal it will attack in the first half of the match. The other team takes the kick off to start the match." USSF Advice to Referees: the decision made by the team winning the toss is no longer between which end of the field to defend or taking the kick off. Now, the decision is only which end of the field to attack: the other team performs the kick off

"A goal may be scored directly from the kick off."

"The ball is in play when it is kicked and moves forward." USSF Advice to Referees: see the general note regarding restarts at the end of this section.

Law 12 (Fouls and Misconduct)

An indirect free kick is awarded if a goalkeeper handles the ball after receiving it from a throw in from his own team. USSF Advice to Referees: this change is intended to complement and extend the so-called "back pass" rule. Referees are reminded that the same considerations apply here as well. For example, a goalkeeper who controls the ball with his feet directly from a throw in by his own team and who then, with no intervening play of the ball by anyone else, proceeds to handle the ball has committed an offense and must be penalized in the manner prescribed. This restriction does not apply if the throw in is performed by an opponent of the goalkeeper, nor does it apply if the goalkeeper does not handle the ball.

"Unsporting behavior" has replaced "ungentlemanly conduct" as a cautionable offense. USSF Advice to Referees: this change in terminology is intended only to reflect the tremendous growth in the participation of women in soccer and to remove an unwieldy phrase, not to change the common meaning of the misconduct being punished.

Failing to respect the required distance when play is restarted and delaying the restart of play have become cautionable offenses. USSF Advice to Referees: contrary to the implication that these are new cautionable offenses, the change is intended only to identify these cautions more specifically and to separate them from "ungentlemanly conduct" (now, "unsporting behavior" where they had previously been categorized. Furthermore, "respecting the required distance" is to be applied only to free kicks (direct and indirect) and to corner kicks. "Delaying the restart of play" is intended to include such actions as kicking the ball away upon the award of a free kick or an excessively prolonged celebration of a goal.

IFAB decisions 13 and 14, which relate to the denial of obvious goal-scoring opportunities, have now become law. USSF Advice to Referees: the intent in this change is only to incorporate into the main body of the Law something which had previously been covered by several IFAB Decisions. No substantive change in Referee practice or decision making should occur.

"Using offensive, insulting or abusive language" replaces "foul or abusive language". USSF Advice to Referees: the IFAB has indicated that the primary reason for this change is that the former phrasing, when translated into other languages, was apparently subject to unnecessarily vague, unclear, or uncertain definitions. Referees should not consider that the new phrasing indicates any change in how this form of misconduct should be treated.

Law 13 (Free Kicks)

"The ball is in play when it is kicked and moves." *USSF Advice to Referees: see the general note regarding restarts at the end of this section.*

Law 14 (The Penalty Kick)

The new text states: "The defending goalkeeper remains on his goal line, facing the kicker, between the goalposts until the ball has been kicked". The phrase "without moving his feet" has been deleted. USSF Advice to Referees: removing this phrase means that the goalkeeper is permitted to move his feet while remaining on the line (i.e., moving sideways), but he is still not permitted to come off the line by stepping or lunging forward until the ball is in play. Furthermore, as with the kick off, the ball is in play when it has been kicked and moves forward (see the general note regarding restarts at the end of this section).

Players who enter the penalty area before the ball has been kicked need not now be cautioned. USSF Advice to Referees: Law 14 previously indicated that any player encroaching on a penalty kick was to be cautioned for ungentlemanly conduct at the appropriate time (after waiting to see the outcome of the kick). While this change now removes the obligation to caution for a first occurrence, Referees should caution for persistent infringement if the same player infringes the requirement again. The same guidance applies to a goalkeeper who infringes upon the requirement not to come off the goal line prior to the penalty kick being taken.

Law 16 (The Goal Kick)

"A goal may be scored directly from a goal kick." *USSF Advice to Referees: Law 16 states further that such a goal may be scored only against the opposing team.*

Law 17 (The Corner Kick)

"The ball is placed inside the corner arc at the nearest corner flagpost." *USSF Advice to Referees: The purpose of this change is to emphasize that the ball must be completely contained within the corner arc, with no part extending beyond the lines enclosing the corner arc area.*

"The ball is in play when it is kicked and moves." *USSF Advice to Referees: see the general note regarding restarts at the end of this section.*

General Note Regarding Restarts

The requirement that the ball be moved "the distance of its circumference" before being considered "in play" on a kick off, indirect free kick, direct free kick, penalty kick, or corner kick has been eliminated entirely. Thus, indirect and direct free kicks and corner kicks are now only required to be kicked and to move, while kick offs and penalty kicks are required only to be kicked and to move forward, in order to be considered in play. As before, a free kick awarded to the defense inside its penalty area is not in play until it exits the penalty area into the field. The IFAB has emphasized that only minimal movement is needed to meet the "kicked and moves" requirement.

II. MANDATORY INSTRUCTIONS TO THE REFEREES

1. Referees **must not permit** goalkeepers to take more than four steps while holding the ball, as stipulated in Law 12. *USSF Advice to Referees: the IFAB is again emphasizing the need to adhere strictly to this limitation on the goalkeeper as a means of reducing time-wasting (see below), but Referees are reminded that the restriction on steps by the goalkeeper is not intended to apply until the ball is in fact controlled with the hands.*

2. If the goalkeeper holds the ball for longer than 5-6 seconds, the Referee must adjudge it as **time-wasting and award an indirect free kick**. *USSF Advice to Referees: the IFAB has indicated that the four-step rule has proven inadequate in getting the goalkeeper to put the ball back into active play without delay. The introduction of this mandatory instruction is to provide a guideline to "wasting time" under these circumstances and thus to speed the return of the ball to active play. Referees are reminded that their mechanic for measuring this time should not include any actions which would draw unnecessary attention (for example, audible counting or hand displays of elapsed seconds).*

3. Under no circumstances may the Referee take part in any experiment either with the Laws or with anything else, such as wearing a microphone during a match, without proper authorization. *USSF Advice to Referees: this mandatory instruction should be taken to mean that, within the United States, no experiments with changes in the Laws or with such technological innovations as the wearing of microphones are permitted without the express permission of the Federation, following guidance from the IFAB. Referees are expected to satisfy themselves that appropriate approval has been received before participating in any experiments.*