

ASK THE REFEREE

by Jim Allen

WHEN TO END A PERIOD OF PLAY

Your question:

When should the referee signal the end of the half or game? Does the ball have to be in play or can the whistle be blown at any time that the referee hasn't stopped the game? For example if the ball is to be put into play with a throw-in, goal kick, or corner kick, can the whistle be blown before the throw-in or kick?

USSF answer (April 30, 2001):

Law 5 empowers the referee to act as timekeeper and keeps a record of the match. Law 7 instructs the referee to add time (at his discretion) for time lost in either half of a game or in any overtime period for the reasons listed in Law 7 (Allowance for Time Lost). Referees should remember that, in addition to the reasons listed in Law 7, there are "other causes" that consume time, such as kick-offs, throw-ins, dropped balls, free kicks, and replacement of lost or defective balls. Many of the reasons for stoppages in play and thus "lost time" are, however, entirely normal elements of the game. This should be taken into account in applying discretion regarding the time to be added. The main objective should be to restore playing time to the match which is lost due to excessively prolonged or unusual stoppages.

The Laws are silent on precisely when the referee should end a period of play, but common sense and the Laws suggest that the referee should weigh the factors listed in the paragraph above regarding time lost and then make the decision on how much time to add -- and thus when to end the period. Common practice throughout the world is to wait until the ball is either out of play or is in an area from which a goal is unlikely to be scored in the next several seconds.

Once the referee has decided that time is up (including all discretionary time), the match should be stopped. If he fails to do this, for whatever reason (usually a misplaced desire to give one of the two teams an advantage which it did not earn), he has become a supporter of that team.
