



Handling The Ball

2009 Referee Program Directives
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Keys to Identifying Handling the Ball

There are several key criteria referees should use to determine whether contact between a player's hand/arm and the ball constitutes a foul for handling. Many of the criteria have formed the foundation of referee identification of handling offenses for years. Despite this foundation, handling criteria continue to be applied inconsistently.

Going forward, additional criteria will need to be considered by officials in determining if contact by the ball with the hand/arm is, in fact, a handling offense. For example: ***Did the player make himself bigger?***

The following 3 criteria should be the primary factors considered by the referee:

1. Making yourself bigger

This refers to the placement of the arm(s)/hand(s) of the defending player at the time the ball is played by the opponent. Should an arm/hand be in a position that takes away space from the team with the ball and the ball contacts the arm/hand, the referee should interpret this contact as handling. Referees should interpret this action as the defender "***deliberately***" putting his arm/hand in a position in order to reduce the options of the opponent (like spreading your arms wide to take away the passing lane of an attacker).

- Does the defender use his hand/arm as a barrier?
- Does the defender use his hand/arm to take away space and/or the passing lane from the opponent?
- Does the defender use his hand/arm to occupy more space by extending his reach or extending the ability of his body to play the ball thereby benefiting from the extension(s)?

2. Is the arm or hand in an "unnatural position?"

Is the arm or hand in a position that is not normal or natural for a player performing the task at hand.

3. Did the player “benefit?”

In considering all the “signs” described above, the referee should also consider the result of the player’s (usually a defender) action. Did the defender’s action (handling of the ball) deny an opportunity (for example, a pass or shot on goal) that would have otherwise been available to the opponent? Did the offending player gain an unfair tactical advantage from contact with the hand/arm which enabled him to retain possession? In other words: **Did the player benefit** by putting his hand/arm in an “unnatural position?” The referee needs to be able to quickly calculate **the result of the player’s action** to determine whether an offence has been committed.

After applying the aforementioned criteria, if the referee is still uncertain as to whether handling the ball has occurred, the referee should then incorporate the following two criteria as part of his decision making process:

4. Reaction Time

The less time a defender has to react, the less likely there has been a handling offense. For example, a ball struck from a close distance, or a very fast moving ball, or a ball coming in from a direction which is outside the defender’s view gives little or no time for the defender’s reaction to be “deliberate.” The referee must take into consideration whether the defender’s reaction is purely instinctive, taken to protect sensitive areas of the body as the face. Distance is a factor in determining “reaction time.” The further the ball, the more reaction time a play may have.

5. Hand / arm to ball

Referees must be ready to judge whether the player moved his arm to the ball thereby initiating the contact. Additionally, the referee should evaluate whether the player deliberately readjusted his body position to block the ball thus intentionally playing the ball with his hand/arm.