

Soccer Points of Emphasis - 2024-25

By NFHS on July 11, 2024

soccer

Official's Toolbox for Game Management

A referee's "toolbox" for game management consists of various skills, techniques, and strategies they can employ to effectively officiate a match and maintain control over the players, coaches and game environment. Here are a few items in a referee's toolbox:

- **Communication:** Clear and effective communication with players, coaches, and the officiating team is key. Referees can use verbal and non-verbal cues to convey decisions, instructions, and warnings. Working constructively and in cooperation with game site administration is important to facilitating a positive game environment.
- **Game Control:** Referees use their authority to manage the tempo and flow of the game. They may intervene to calm tensions, prevent conflicts, or address unsporting behavior. This can include issuing verbal warnings, cautions, ejections or temporarily suspending the game and working with administrators to deal with spectators or outside interference.
- **Development:** With the requirement to explain misconduct incidents to both coaches, an educational atmosphere is an important component of the high school game and officials should approach interactions positively with respect and professionalism. Officials should clearly and concisely state the specific nature of the misconduct fostering a positive learning environment in the face of difficult situations.
- **Adaptability:** Every game is different, and referees must adapt to changing circumstances. They may need to adjust their officiating style based on the level of play, the behavior of the players, or unexpected developments during the match.

By utilizing these tools effectively while managing emotions and remaining calm and composed, referees can promote fair play, ensure player safety, and contribute to a positive and enjoyable experience for everyone involved in the game.

Stopping a Promising Attack

The inclusion of the considerations for a promising attack serves as a crucial clarification in the rules, specifically addressing what was previously referred to as "tactical fouls". While the considerations are clear for obvious goal-scoring opportunities, promising attacks may be more difficult to recognize. The strategy of tactically fouling with the aim to interrupt the attacking team's progress without necessarily denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity is a form of misconduct. Sections 7 and 8 in Rule 12 highlight the importance of discerning the nature of these types of tactical offenses for consistent and fair officiating.

Like DOGSO situations, fouls that stop a promising attack (SPA) might not be severe in nature, but the offense's impact on the attacking team's potential needs to be recognized and dealt with accordingly. Officials need to understand the nuanced dynamics of play and maintain a tactical awareness of the advancing phase of play to recognize SPA incidents. Referees are tasked with evaluating multiple factors to determine the promise of an attack, encompassing elements like player positioning, ball control, defensive presence, skill, and the pace of the game. Importantly, any foul that unfairly stops or interrupts a promising attack is considered misconduct, warranting a caution and a yellow card for the offending player. If SPA

occurs within the offender's penalty area, and the foul is an attempt to play the ball, the player is not cautioned if the referee awards a penalty kick. In other SPA circumstances inside the penalty area (e.g. holding, pulling, pushing, no possibility to play the ball, etc.) the offending player must be cautioned.

After a Goal

After a goal is scored, officials must stay alert as there are several important considerations and tasks to manage. In addition to lower priority administrative tasks, officials must be vigilant after a goal for any signs of escalating tension or potential misconduct and address any issues promptly to prevent situations from escalating. Key aspects of concern include:

- Working as a team with other officials (i.e., lead assistant referee) to determine if the ball was, in fact, scored properly by wholly crossing the goal line, under the crossbar, and between the goal posts. The crew must ensure that the goal was legally scored and there were no infringements or violations during the buildup to the goal. This includes checking for any potential offside offenses by the attacking team that would prompt the goal to be disallowed.
- Observing players' reactions and behaviors after the goal to identify and address any unsporting actions or misconduct. This includes potential confrontations, dissent, or provocative actions. If the team that scored is behind, they may try to quickly retrieve the ball from the goal or grab it out of an opponent's hands. The defense that was setting an offside trap may swarm around the assistant referee to argue about a non-call. These can be volatile situations and proactive officials will intervene quickly to make their presence known. Encourage attackers to return to their side of the field promptly or remind defenders the decisions of the officiating crew must be respected before their actions rise to misconduct. When behavior crosses the line, recognize it and deal with it firmly and fairly according to the rules.
- Monitoring player celebrations to prevent excessive or inappropriate behavior. While celebrating after a goal is allowable, which might include leaving the field, players cannot prohibit a timely restart with excessive or prolonged acts. This includes unsporting gestures, removal of shirts, taunting, or any actions that could incite the opposing team or spectators.
- Record keeping and beckoning in substitutes. The crew should include in their pre-game discussion how to maintain the game record while also managing players after a goal is scored. The crew should establish before the game who is responsible for keeping an eye on the field while another official is recording in their book. Either team may substitute an unlimited number of players from the bench provided they check-in. Officials need to be mindful of those substitutes which may trickle in and work together as a crew to recognize substitutes wanting to enter the game.

After a goal, there is much more to do than just adding a tally mark in the book. Officials should focus on the players, recognize situations that could lead to conflicts, be present and proactive in their responses, and deal with misconduct appropriately.