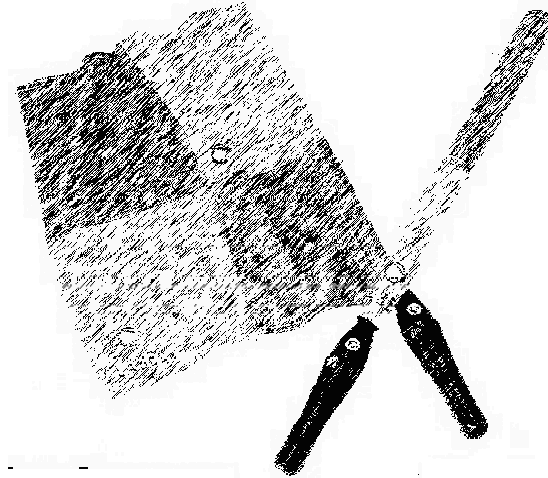




Electronic Flags



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"Electronic Flags" can be an effective tool for the officiating team. Though still relatively new, their use has been monitored carefully at the highest competitive levels and enough experience has been gained to suggest a number of general guidelines. These devices, however, remain a specialized aid for officials to be used judiciously.

"Electronic Flags" are first and foremost flags and, as such, must be used in accordance with the USSF Guide to Procedures (1998). The "beeper" feature is a means of enhancing communication between the referee and the assistant referees under conditions in which the flag by itself may not be noticed. There are very few situations in which the beeper alone would be used: in most cases, the assistant referee should use the beeper along with the appropriate flag signal.

Because the beeper feature of these flags more readily demands attention, assistant referees must take particular care not to overuse this signal enhancement to avoid distracting the referee from more important events on the field. The general principle should be that the electronic capability is a means only of calling the attention of the referee to the fact that a visual flag signal is being given out of the sight of the referee or that a critical visual flag signal is being given.

Guideline 1. When electronic flags will be used, the referee will discuss the techniques and requirements (in what situations, in what manner, etc.) as a part of the pregame preparation.

Guideline 2. In most cases, the electronic signal is used with an existing visual flag signal (in accordance with the USSF Guide to Procedures). The electronic signal can be used with no visual flag signal to indicate:

- A request during active play to return to the field from a previously injured player who had left the field temporarily, and
- A malfunction of the scoreboard clock or an otherwise apparent error in timing.

Guideline 3. In implementing **Guideline 2**, in addition to the proper visual signal, the beeper can be used to draw the referee's attention to:

- A request to substitute. If the beeper signal is maintained even after eye contact with the referee is made, it indicates a request for the referee to inspect a returning player who had previously been sent from the field to correct equipment, bleeding, or blood on the uniform;
- Serious misconduct or a foul occurring out of the sight of the referee, for which the referee would likely stop play if aware of the event (where electronic flags are being used, the lead assistant referee is not expected to "mirror" such a signal from the trail assistant referee since the main purpose of "mirroring" is to draw the referee's attention to a visual flag signal being given behind his back);
- Continued play or competition for the ball even though it has wholly crossed over a boundary line and returned to the field (including situations in which an otherwise unnoticed goal has been scored); and
- An offside infringement in which the attacking team retains control of the ball either during play or for a restart, particularly if the offside infringement occurs inside the penalty area where the infringing attacker retains control of the ball and continues an active attack on goal.

Guideline 4. Referees are warned not to become overly reliant on the enhanced signaling ability of the electronic flags. Do not replace or reduce existing recommended mechanics of glancing at the assistant referee on through balls or of making frequent visual contact with all members of the officiating team at stoppages or lulls in active play.

Guideline 5. Assistant Referees should avoid overuse of the electronic signal to the point that it becomes either a distraction or merely additional background "noise." Referees are advised to monitor such use during the first half of play and to discuss any problems during the halftime break.

Guideline 6. The flag with the faster "beep" should be assigned to the senior assistant referee and should be checked prior to taking the field for the second half. Electronic flags must be tested as part of the pregame preparations and extra batteries should be kept at the fourth official's table.

Guideline 7. Except as may be modified in the pregame conference and assuming an electronic signal is to be given, assistant referees should continue signaling electronically until the objective is achieved -- gaining the referee's attention -- as indicated in most cases by positive eye contact.

Guideline 8. The pregame discussion regarding the use of the electronic signal should include means of avoiding situations in which both assistant referees attempt to signal the referee simultaneously. When it is likely that both assistant referees are reacting to the same event, only the assistant referee who is closer to the event should use the electronic signal. In those rare situations in which the farther assistant referee believes it is necessary to use the electronic signal to indicate a separate, different event, the signal should be delayed if at all possible until the nearer assistant referee is no longer using the "beeper" (e.g. when the flag is dropped).

The above guidelines define the circumstances in which electronic flags are properly used. As flags alone, they come under the provisions of the USSF Guide to Procedures (1998). The additional electronic signaling function must not be used for ordinary events when the referee is fully aware of the visual flag signal.

The beeper is limited, for example, to very specific offside situations, not for every offside. It is limited to very specific foul and misconduct situations, not for every foul or case of misconduct. It is limited to signaling for a substitution only when the referee cannot see the visual signal.



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1998

The guidelines for the use of electronic flags are part of the United States Soccer Federation's referee development and education program. The initial draft of this document was prepared by Brian Hall in association with Greg Barkey, Richard Grady, Kevin Stott, and Paul Tamborino. Thanks go to Dan Heldman, who edited and compiled the final version, and Josef Zeevi, who prepared this memorandum for publication in both hardcopy and electronic formats.