

UNITED STATES SOCCER FEDERATION



CAUTIONS AND CAUTIONABLE OFFENSES 2004

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The Laws of the Game identify seven cautionable offenses (Law 12). These include fairly specific actions (leaving the field without the permission of the referee), very general actions (unsporting behavior), and highly judgmental areas (dissent). In all cases, the referee is expected to evaluate a player's behavior based on several factors:

- Does the act meet the generally accepted and understood meaning of the offense?
- Was the act, even if an offense, trifling?
- Would the issuance of a caution for this misconduct likely have desirable results for game and/or player management?

If the player's act meets the criteria for the offense, is not trifling, and its punishment will have a salutary effect, the caution should be given. Whether the referee should stop play to do so or whether play should be allowed to continue until the next stoppage involves the application of the same advantage concept that is used to decide whether to stop play for a foul.

Every caution must be given for one and only one of the seven reasons listed in Law 12. Player behavior, of course, may involve several forms of misconduct at the same time and the referee must decide whether to caution each one separately (in which case, the second caution must also be followed by a send-off and display of the red card) or to issue a single caution for the total behavior. If the latter is chosen, the referee must decide which specific reason in the Law will be reported as the basis for the caution. For referees officiating professional matches where there are points associated with various forms of misconduct, the referee is expected to select the reason which carries the highest point value. In either case, however, the referee should fully describe in the game report all misconduct the player has committed in addition to the misconduct for which the caution was given.

There is much discussion among referees as to whether a caution is "mandatory" or "discretionary" and these terms have often been used in the past when the subject of misconduct has arisen. One purpose of this position paper is to reorganize the discussion on this matter and to recommend that referees avoid such terms in the future. *The Laws of the Game* require that the referee consider a player's behavior as "cautionable" when it meets the standards for the offense. It does not require that the caution actually be given unless the referee further decides that the misconduct is not trifling and that the caution will result in a desirable change in player conduct.

The referee's judgment (discretion) is a critical element in deciding, for example, whether what a player has just said or done is dissent within the meaning of Law 12 and guidance from USSF (see the USSF memorandum on "Misconduct Involving Language/Gestures," dated March 14, 2003). If the referee decides that it is "dissent," then the offense must be considered cautionable, but this does not mean that the yellow card must be displayed.

The referee must then make a second decision—in this particular case involving this particular player at this particular point in the match, based on the way the match has proceeded so far—as to whether or not the dissent is trifling and whether or not displaying the card would have a positive effect on this player's behavior and the behavior of the other players in the game.

Each caution must be approached in this way as a combination of mandatory and discretionary decisions the referee must make.

In no case may a caution (or send-off) be delayed beyond the next restart. It must be given as soon as play is stopped, even if this means preventing a team from taking advantage of a quick restart (if the kick is taken, it must be called back and not taken until the delayed card is shown). No alteration of this procedure is permitted.

Because players have a right to some reasonable degree of predictability regarding how the referee will evaluate player actions in terms of the seven cautionable offenses, USSF has developed various guidelines for each of these offenses which are designed to provide additional insight into their meaning. The USSF memorandum on player language, for example, provides detailed criteria the referee can use to help judge whether any particular example has crossed the line into misconduct and whether, having crossed the line, the player should be cautioned (or sent off). Referees must avoid purely personal standards in making these judgments. Further, many cautions can be avoided if the referee clearly advises players when their conduct is approaching the level of severity which would warrant a card (as is recommended, but not required, for persistent infringement or delaying the restart of play).

The International F. A. Board (IFAB) has also assisted referees by providing specific examples of various forms of misconduct. Stating explicitly that a particular action is a form of misconduct serves to draw attention to it and to emphasize the likelihood that it should be cautioned when it occurs. It is not that each of these specified actions **must** be carded but that the referee's judgment is simplified in determining if the action is cautionable. The decision actually to give the card remains discretionary based on the factors already noted.

Note: The items included under the category of “unsporting behavior” are simply those for which examples are found in official documents. Other such incidents can and do occur in games around the world. It is up to the referee to judge which acts constitute “unsporting behavior” and act accordingly, basing the decision on the circumstances of the incident itself, the referee's needs for proper player management, overall conditions in the game and general societal norms.

In addition, the referee may not show cards after the match is finished. The referee should simply report the misconduct to the appropriate authorities.

The remainder of this paper is a compilation of the specific examples of cautionable misconduct which may be found in FIFA and USSF publications:

- *The Laws of the Game* (LOTG),
- “Additional Instructions” (abbreviated here as AI and found printed in the Lawbook after the Laws),
- *Questions and Answers* (Q&A, last published in 2004),
- Advice to Referees (ATR), and
- USSF memoranda, including the annual publication *Instructions for Referees and Resolutions Affecting Team Coaches and Players* (Resolutions)

In all cases, the source of the specific example and the cautionable offense (from among the seven listed in Law 12) with which it is associated will be identified. Referees should read the Q&A carefully, as there are numerous cases mentioned in which only the referee’s common sense and discretion will dictate whether a caution should be given.

1. Unsporting behavior

A substitute enters the field of play without permission during play (LOTG)

Any “other infringements” of Law 3, such as entering the field of play to celebrate a goal (LOTG)

Uses a deliberate trick while the ball is in play in order to circumvent the Law (LOTG)

Using a deliberate trick to circumvent the Law while taking a free kick (LOTG)

A player commits a “reckless” foul (ATR 12.3)

A player uses a teammate’s shoulders as a support in jumping for the ball (formerly in the Additional Instructions; still valid)

Two players of the same team commit any form of unsporting behavior towards one another (Q&A)

A player commits an act deemed by the referee as bringing the game into disrepute (e. g., aggressive attitude, inflammatory behavior, or taunting)(ATR 12.28.1)

A player removes the jersey when celebrating a goal (LOTG, Q&A)

A player gives an excessive demonstration of jubilation—e. g., by removing the jersey, jumping over the boundary fence, gesticulating at the opponents or spectators, ridiculing them by pointing at his or her shirt, or similar provocative action (Q&A)

Unfairly distracts or impedes the thrower at a throw-in (LOTG; also in Q&A; ATR 15.7)

Deliberately handles the ball to score a goal (AI 2004; Q&A; ATR 12.28.1)

Deliberately and blatantly handles the ball to prevent an opponent gaining possession (AI 2004; Q&A)

Blatantly holding an opponent to play the ball or to gain possession, including holding the shirt or other parts of the uniform (Q&A; AI 2004; ATR 12.7)

Holding or hindering when the ball is out of play to prevent an the opponent from running into position (Resolutions)

A player holds an opponent to prevent him gaining possession of the ball or taking up an advantageous position (AI 2004)

Making gestures which, in the opinion of the referee, are provocative, derisory or inflammatory or by climbing on to a perimeter fence to celebrate a goal being scored (AI 2004)

A player does not comply with the referee's instruction to leave the field after play has been stopped for this player's serious injury (AI 2004)

Feigning injury or pretending to have been fouled (simulation, AI 2004)

Goalkeeper or another player draws unauthorized marks on the field of play with his foot (Q&A; ATR 1.6, ATR 12.28.1)

A player changes places with the goalkeeper without the referee's permission (Q&A; ATR 8.3, ATR 12.28.1)

A player who has been replaced subsequently returns to the field as a substitute (Q&A; ATR 3.11; Note: This does not apply when the rules of the competition allow multiple substitutions)

A player smokes a cigarette or uses a mobile phone during the game (Q&A; ATR 12.28.1)

A player participates in play after receiving the referee's permission to leave the field (Q&A; ATR 3.12)

A player who has left the field to receive treatment trips an opponent inside the field (Q&A)

A player who has left the field to avoid offside but returns to the field and engages in play should be cautioned for unsporting behavior if the referee believes this movement had a tactical aim or was in some way a feint (Q&A; ATR 11.8)

A player leaves the field to put an opponent in an offside position unfairly (Q&A; ATR 11.10)

A player whose movement carries him off the field distracts an opponent as the ball is being kicked into goal (Q&A)

A player intentionally lies on the ball for an unreasonable length of time (Q&A)

The goalkeeper hits the ball with a shinguard or other object to prevent it from entering the goal (Q&A)

A player holds an opponent who is beyond the touch line to prevent the opponent from continuing a run (Q&A)

A teammate of the identified kicker at a penalty kick rushes forward to take the kick instead (Q&A)

A player performs a direct free kick foul in a reckless manner (ATR 12.28.1)

A player commits a direct free kick foul while tackling for the ball from behind without endangering the safety of an opponent (ATR 12.28.1)

A player interferes with or prevents the goalkeeper from releasing the ball from the hands into play (ATR 12.28.1)

A player on the defending team verbally distracts an opponent during play or at a restart (ATR 12.28.1)

A player fails to follow the referee's request to remove jewelry—or other unsafe equipment (Q&A)

A ball is thrown in and a defender punches it over the bar (Q&A: no goal is possible directly from a throw-in)

A player tries to prevent a goal by deliberately handling it, but is unsuccessful and the ball enters the goal (Q&A)

A player deliberately handles the ball, but fails to prevent it reaching an opponent (Q&A)

A non-goalskeeper takes a goal kick under windy conditions; the ball leaves the penalty area, but is blown back into the penalty area directly to the kicker, who handles the ball to prevent it entering the goal (Q&A)

An opponent standing in front of the thrower moves or gesticulates to distract the thrower (Q&A)

2. Dissent by word or action

Protesting at a referee's decision (AI 2004; ATR 12.28.2)

A goalkeeper who leaves the penalty area (not beckoned by the referee) to engage the referee or an assistant referee in debate regarding a decision has committed dissent. (ATR 12.28.2)

3. Persistent infringement of the Laws of the Game

Referees should be alert at all times to players who persistently infringe the Laws. In particular they must be aware that even if a player commits a number of different offences he must still be cautioned for persistently infringing the Laws (AI 2004)

Examples given in ATR 12.28.3:

- violates Law 14 again, having previously been warned (also ATR 14.3)
- fails to start or restart play properly or promptly, having previously been warned
- if playing as a goalkeeper, wastes time, having previously been warned or penalized for this behavior

4. Delays the restart of play

Delaying the restart of play (AI 2004)

Taking a free kick from the wrong position with the sole intention of forcing the referee to order a retake (AI 2004)

Appearing to take a throw-in but suddenly leaving it to a team-mate to throw-in (AI 2004; Resolutions)

Kicking the ball away or carrying it away with the hands after the referee has stopped play (AI 2004; ATR 12.28.4; Resolutions)

Excessively delaying the taking of a throw-in or free kick (AI 2004; ATR 12.28.4)

Delaying leaving the field when being substituted (AI 2004)

Fails to restart play after being so instructed by the referee (ATR 12.28.4)

Performing a throw-in improperly with the apparent intention of being required to perform the throw-in again, thus wasting time (ATR 12.28.4)

The thrower deliberately delays taking a throw-in (Q&A)

Performs any restart in such a way that the ball is not properly put into play, thus forcing a repetition of the restart (Resolution)

Unnecessarily moving a ball which has already been properly placed on the ground for a goal kick (ATR 12.28.4)

A player, after being warned, again restarts play without waiting for the referee's signal (ATR 13.5)

Stands or strolls in front of the ball when a free kick has been awarded to the opposing team in order to give the defending team time to organize the wall (Resolutions)

5. Fails to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a corner kick or free kick

Fails to respect the required distance when play is being restarted (Q&A; AI 2004; ATR 12.28.5, ATR 12.28.3)

Opponents who move nearer the ball at a free kick before it is in play (Q&A)

6. Enters or re-enters the field of play without the referee's permission

A player enters the field of play without the referee's permission (Q&A, several times)

A named substitute who takes the place of a player before the start of the match without the referee's permission (Q&A)

Note: This sort of misconduct is mentioned numerous times within LOTG, as well as within the ATR: see ATR 12.28.6.

7. Deliberately leaves the field of play without the referee's permission

See Law 12 (LOTG)

A player on a team with only seven players leaves the field and fails to return (Q&A)