

# Laws Of The Game

## *Made Easy*

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*Made Easy*



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# U.S. SOCCER

## Foreword

The Laws of the Game are very simple, so calling this little booklet *The Laws of the Game - Made Easy* may seem a bit odd. However, for many of the games played in the United States at the youth and/or recreational level, there are many elements of the Laws that are rarely, if ever, used.

Or at least hardly anyone notices them because there is never a problem. How often, for example, have you seen a soccer ball weighed to make sure it isn't too heavy or too light? When was the last time your game had a fourth official?

At the same time, there are commonly enforced rules that are difficult to find in the officially published *Laws of the Game*. You have to dig deep in the history of the game and in other publications to understand why some things are the way they are.

What follows is a brief, and we hope entertaining, review of the *Laws of the Game*. It is aimed at players, referees, coaches, parents and spectators involved in the thousands of games being played at the local parks every weekend. There is no stadium, no roaring crowds, no network camera crews, no scoreboard, no jumbo megatron screen showing instant replays, no advertising boards - just kids having fun playing the most popular sport in the world.

This booklet does not take the place of a thorough understanding of *The Laws of the Game*. To learn more, you can take classes taught by certified instructors, you can read other publications which go into detail about these things and you can watch many games in the company of experienced officials. To be a referee, player, coach or spectator at the youth recreational level, however, this may be all you need.

The current edition of *The Laws of the Game - Made Easy* takes into account the relatively few changes that occurred in the past year. Please visit the Referee Section of [ussoccer.com](http://ussoccer.com) for more information.



## Foreword

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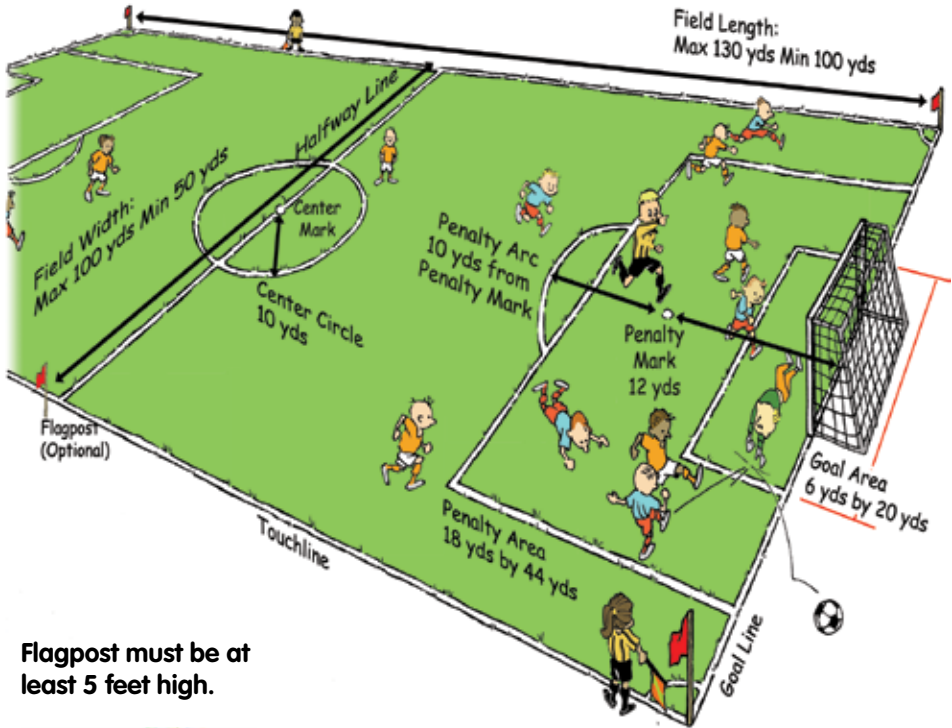
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Here are the important parts of the field and the names we use for them:

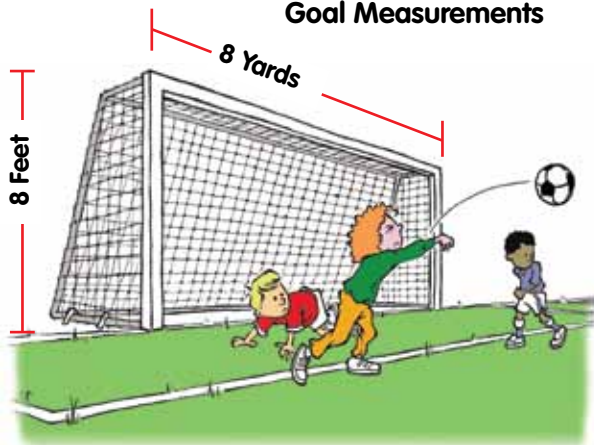


Flagpost must be at least 5 feet high.



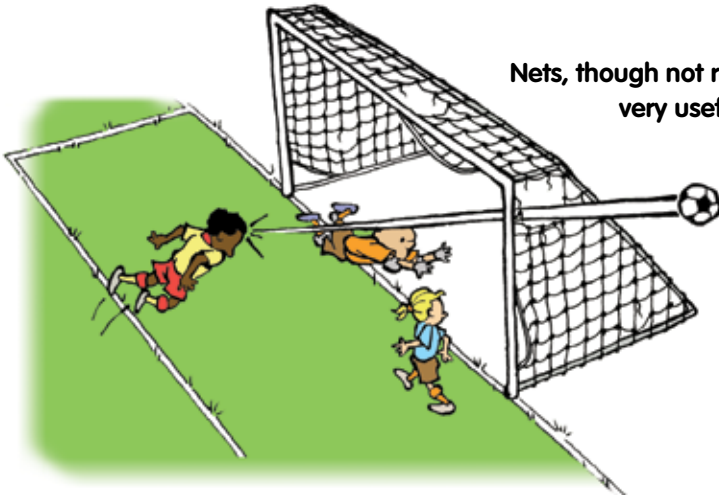
Corner Arc  
1 yard

## Goal Measurements





## Law 1 The Field of Play



Nets, though not required, are very useful.

The length and width of the field and the size of the goal can be different depending on the age of the players. (See local rules.)



CLEATS

BY BILL HINDS





The ball must be **SAFE**.  
(The referee makes this decision.)



Every ball used in the game must be inspected by the referee.

## SIZE OF THE BALL

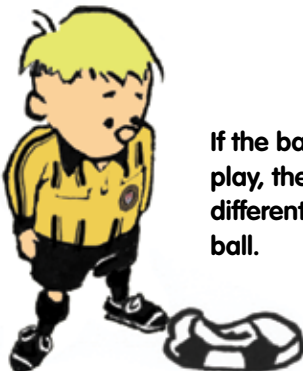
Depends on the age of the players.  
(See local rules.)



**Size 5**  
27"-28"

**Size 4**  
25"-26"

**Size 3**  
23"-24"



If the ball becomes unsafe or flat during play, the referee must stop the game, get a different ball and restart play with a dropped ball.





## Law 3 The Number of Players

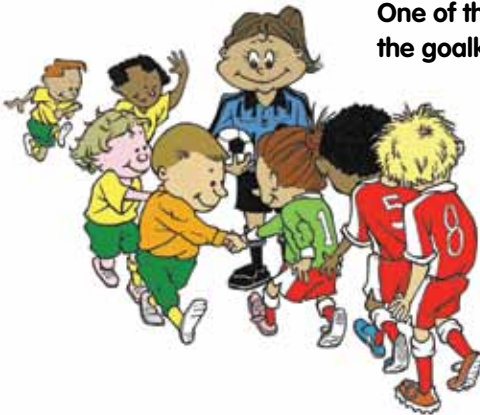
Players are those who are allowed to participate in play on the field.

The number of players on a team can be different depending on the age level of the teams.  
(See local rules.)

For older players, no more than eleven and no fewer than seven for each team can be on the field at a time.



One of the players on each team must be the goalkeeper.



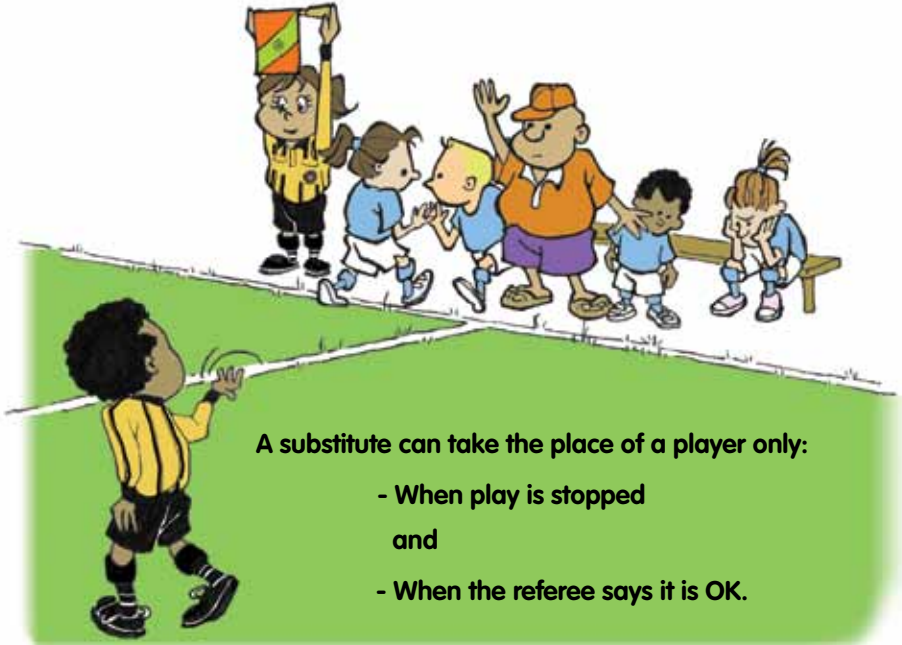
The goalkeeper wears a different colored shirt than any of the other players on either team and the officials.

Substitutes are team members who are not playing on the field but who can replace players. Substitutes must obey the rules just like players.

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BY BILL HINDS





**A substitute can take the place of a player only:**

- When play is stopped
- and
- When the referee says it is OK.



**Substitution opportunities in youth matches may be different based on local rules. The referee needs to be aware of these rules.**

**Substitutions can also be made during the halftime break, but the referee needs to be informed.**

**The substitute must be ready to enter the field at the halfway line when the game is stopped or wait for the next chance.**



## Law 3 The Number of Players

The substitution is not official until the substitute steps onto the field after the referee says it is OK.



A player on the field can change places with the goalkeeper only:

- When play is stopped
- and
- When the referee says it is OK.



Coaches and other team officials on the sidelines must behave responsibly.

If they don't, the referee can remind them about the law.

If the problem continues, the referee can require a coach or team official to leave the area.



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## Player's Uniform

shirt  
shorts  
socks  
shinguards  
shoes



**Shoes and shinguards must be SAFE.**  
(The referee makes this decision.)

**Shinguards must be worn under the socks and provide adequate protection.**



**A player cannot wear something that can hurt anyone on the field. (Example: jewelry)**



**A player on the field who is wearing something dangerous, or whose uniform is not complete, can be instructed to leave the field to correct the problem. The player can return to the field only when the referee agrees that the problem has been corrected.**





### CLEATS



Medical alert jewelry or clothing required by a player's religion may be worn only if

- The referee does not consider it dangerous and
- It does not give the player an unfair advantage while playing.



Medical alert jewelry can normally be made safe by wrapping it with tape (with the necessary information still showing).

### CLEATS

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All other requirements about player uniforms (colors, numbers and so forth) are set by local leagues and tournaments. The referee needs to check on this.



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# Law 5 The Referee

The referee is in charge of the game.



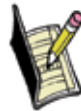
The referee's authority starts when the teams are warming up on the field and continues while play is stopped for any reason and through any tie-breaking procedures.



The referee's authority ends when the game is completely over and the teams have left the field.

## The Referee:

-  Enforces the Laws of the Game
-  Keeps the official time of the game
-  Stops play if there is a serious injury
-  Stops play if a player is guilty of a foul or misconduct
-  Prevents anyone from coming onto the field unless the referee says it is OK
-  Requires a player to leave the field if the player is bleeding or has blood on the uniform
-  Makes sure the field, the ball, and player equipment are safe and legal
-  Suspends or terminates a game if needed
-  Provides the official report of the game



CLEATS

BY BILL HINDS





CLEATS

BY BILL HINDS



A referee can:

- Require a coach or team official to leave the field if their behavior is not proper (a card is not shown)

- Decide not to stop play even if there is a foul or misconduct if stopping play would help the team that committed the foul or misconduct (this is called "applying the advantage")



- Decide not to call any foul or misconduct if the referee decides that the action is trifling (not important, does not have a serious effect on play)

- Decide to let play continue if an injury is not serious

- Caution a player or substitute by showing a yellow card

- Send a player or a substitute from the field by showing a red card



- Make decisions using information from an assistant referee



CLEATS

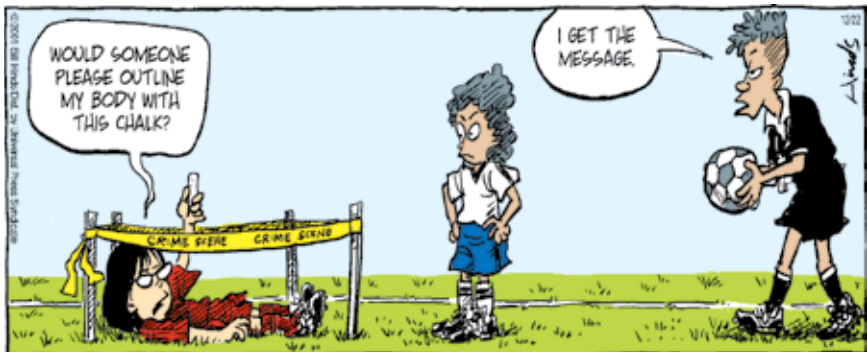
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Referee decisions about the facts of the game, including whether a goal was scored, are final. After the referee says a goal is scored, this decision cannot be changed if the game has been restarted.

CLEATS

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Assistant referees help the referee by signaling:



When the ball has left the field.

Which team gets the throw-in, goal kick, corner kick.



When a team wants to substitute.



When an attacker is offside.

When a foul or misconduct has happened but the referee couldn't see it.



Signals by an assistant referee are to assist the referee. The referee decides how to use this information.

The referee can ask the assistant referee to "help with other things".... for example, checking that an illegal equipment problem has been corrected.





Club linesmen are volunteers from the sideline who help the referee when there are no assistant referees.

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Club linesmen help by flagging when the ball leaves the field.

CLEATS

BY BILL HINDS



CLEATS

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## The Duration of the Match **Law 7**



The length of a game and halftime break can be different based on the age of the players.  
(See local rules.)

A game has two halves of equal length.



The half is over when time runs out. However, a penalty kick called before time runs out must be taken even if this requires extra time.



The referee can add time if play has been stopped and it took too long to start again. It is up to the referee to decide exactly how much time should be allowed for any kind of delay.





## Law 8 The Start and Restart of Play



A coin toss determines which team is on which end of the field at the start of the game. Usually, the visiting team captain calls heads or tails.

The team that wins the toss chooses the end of the field they will attack. The other team kicks off for the first half.

Teams switch ends of the field for the second half of the game. The team that didn't kick off to start the first half kicks off to start the second half.

A kick-off is the way to start each half of the game and to restart play after a goal is scored.



**Kick-off requirements:**

- From the center mark
- Each team in its half of the field
- Players from the other team must be outside the center circle
- Ball is kicked and moves forward (into the “other half” of the field)

The player who takes the kick-off can't touch the ball again until the ball has been touched by another player from either team (Indirect free kick restart if this happens.)

A goal can be scored directly from a kick-off. (“Directly” means that no one else touched or played the ball.)



**A dropped ball is the way to restart play if play has been stopped for any reason not covered in the Law.**

**A dropped ball cannot be played by anyone until it hits the ground.  
(Otherwise, the ball has to be dropped again.)**



**There is no requirement that any players at all or any certain number of players have to participate in a dropped ball restart.**



**A dropped ball may not be taken inside either team's goal area.**

**Instead, the ball is dropped on the goal area line closest to where the ball was when play was stopped.**

CLEATS

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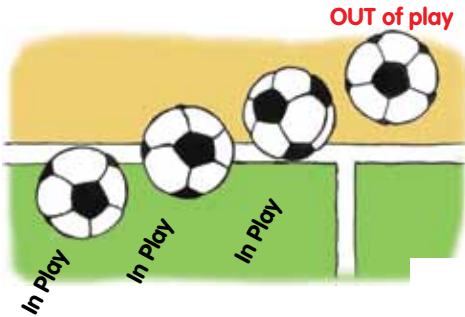
## Law 9 The Ball In and Out of Play

CLEATS



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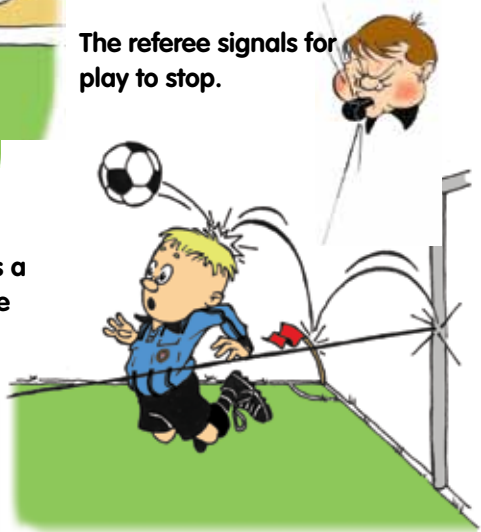
The ball is always in play until:



It completely leaves the field across the goal line or touch line

or

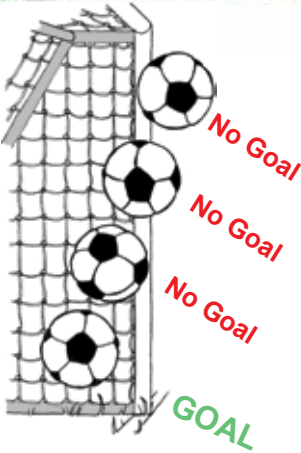
The referee signals for play to stop.



The ball is still in play even if it hits a flagpost, goal post, crossbar or the referee.



If there are football-style goal posts or anything in addition to the two goal posts and a crossbar, the ball is out of play if it hits these other parts even if the ball stays on the field.



A goal is scored when the whole ball completely crosses the goal line between the goal posts and under the crossbar.



A goal cannot be counted if it was the result of a foul by the attacking team.



The team with more goals wins the game. If the teams have an equal number of goals or no goals, the game is a tie.

Local rules or tournaments may require that a game has to have a winner. In that case, the local rules will also specify how to break the tie.

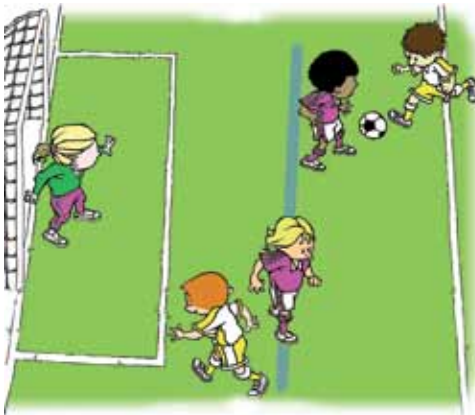
CLEATS

BY BILL HINDS





An attacker is in an **offside position** if, when a teammate has the ball, the attacker is



- Closer to the other team's goal than the ball
- and
- Closer to the other team's goal than the second to last defender
- and
- In the other team's end of the field

## Offside Position



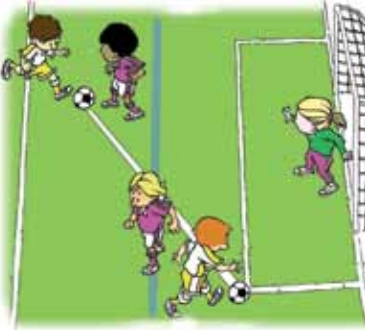
**It is not illegal for a player to be in an offside position.**

## Offside Position





What is **illegal** is when an attacker who is in an offside position becomes actively involved in play by:



### Interfering with play

(Having the ball passed to a player, running toward the ball or a combination of these.)



### Interfering with an opponent

(Getting in the way of a player on the other team, including the goalkeeper.)



### Gaining an advantage

(Receiving or running to a ball which has bounced off a goal post or crossbar or that has been deflected by the goalkeeper or another defender.)

When offside is called:

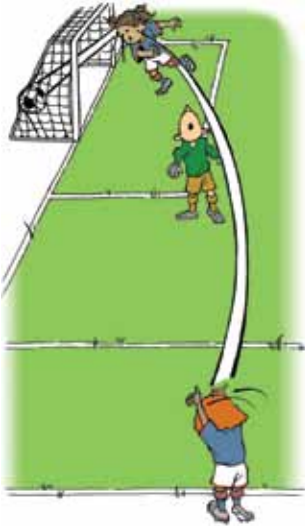
Indirect free kick from where the offside player was.







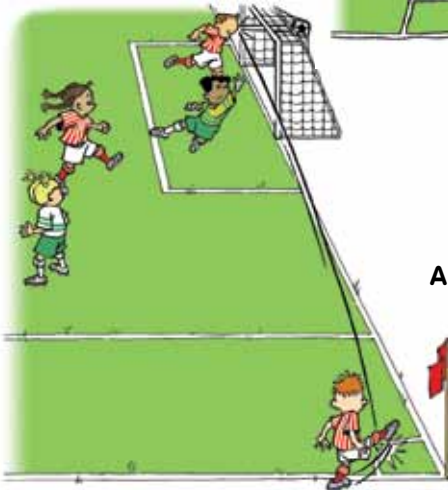
It is **not** an offside violation if a player in an offside position gets the ball directly from:



A throw-in



A goal kick

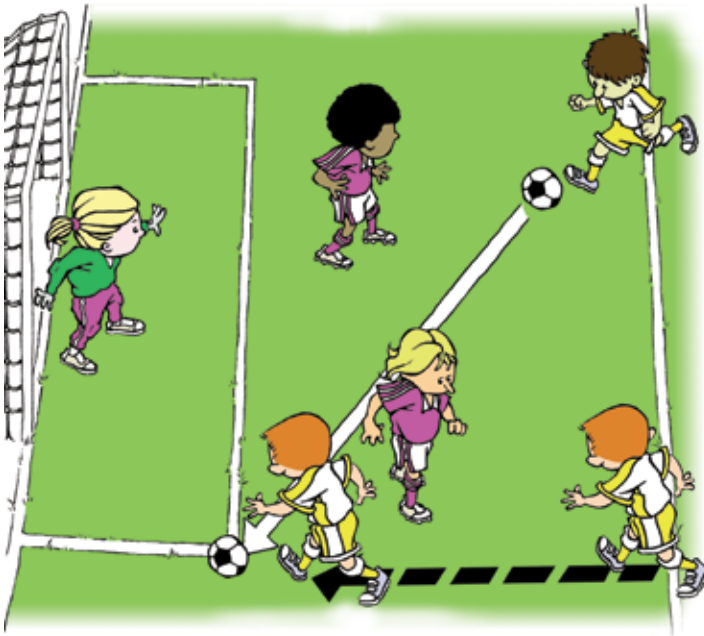
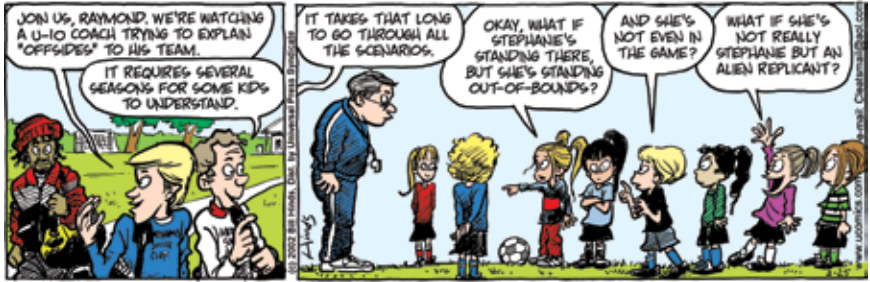


A corner kick



CLEATS

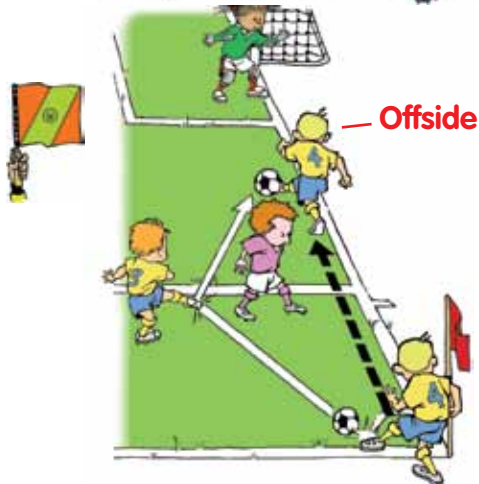
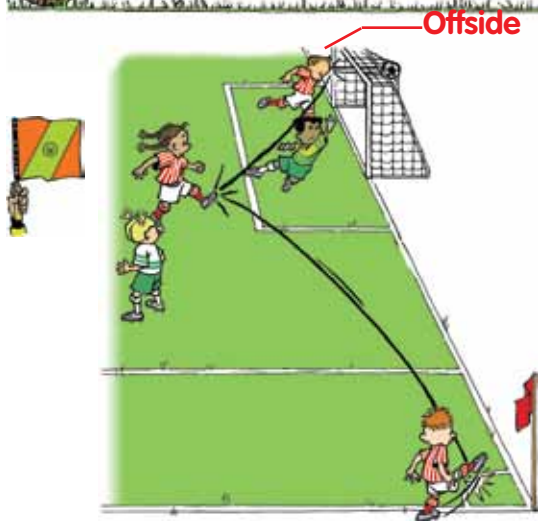
BY BILL HINDS



Not Offside  
when the ball  
is passed.

Not Offside





## Offside

In each of these plays, an attacking player gets involved from an offside position.

Player is coming back from offside position.



## FOULS

For something to be a foul, it must be:

- Committed by a player
- While the ball is in play
- On the field of play and
- Against a player on the other team



## MISCONDUCT

Misconduct can occur in many situations:

- On or off the field
- By a player or by a substitute
- With the ball in play or not in play
- By itself or along with a foul

Some violations can be both a foul and misconduct.



Some fouls are punished by restarting play with a direct free kick taken from where the foul occurred. If a direct free kick foul is committed by a defender within the defending team's penalty area, the punishment is a penalty kick for the other team.





## Law 12 Fouls and Misconduct

These six fouls result in a direct free kick if the referee decides it was done carelessly, recklessly, or using too much force:



**Kicking or attempting to kick an opponent**



**Tripping or attempting to trip an opponent**



**Striking or attempting to strike an opponent**



**Jumping at an opponent**



**Charging an opponent**



**Pushing an opponent**



The other direct free kick fouls are:

While tackling for the ball, making contact with the opponent before contacting the ball (this includes tackling an opponent from behind with little or no concern for the safety of the opponent)



Holding an opponent



Spitting at an opponent

Deliberately handling the ball with any part of the hand or arm (Goalkeepers are allowed to do this if they are within their own penalty area)





## Law 12 Fouls and Misconduct

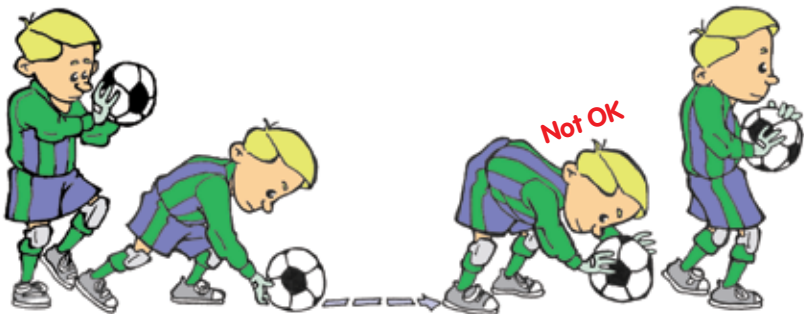
Other fouls are punished by restarting play with an indirect free kick from where the foul occurred. A goal cannot be scored directly from an indirect free kick (the ball must touch another player first).

Indirect free kick offenses by the goalkeeper are:

- Holding the ball for more than six seconds



- Handling the ball a second time before the ball has been played by anyone else (teammate or opponent)



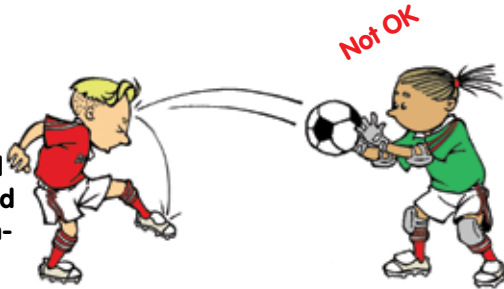


- Handling the ball directly after it has been deliberately kicked to the goalkeeper by a teammate or thrown in by a teammate to the goalkeeper.



Trickery

This player could also be cautioned for Unsportsman-like Behavior.





The other indirect free kick fouls are:



**Playing dangerously**



**Getting in the way of an opponent while not playing the ball (this used to be called "obstruction" and is now called impeding)**



**Getting in the way of the opposing goalkeeper who is trying to put the ball into play.**







## MISCONDUCT

Players who commit misconduct are shown:



a yellow card (caution)

or



a red card (send off)



A player who gets a red card

- Must leave the game
- Cannot return to the game
- Cannot be replaced  
(The team must play short)

Substitutes on the sideline can also be cautioned or sent from the field

If this happens, the substitute's team does not have to play short





# 7

Misconduct/Violations which can be cautioned are:



**Unsportsmanlike behavior**

**Dissent**

(showing disagreement with the referee's or assistant referee's decision by words or action)



**Persistent Infringement**  
(committing many fouls)

**Delaying the restart of play**  
(not starting play quickly enough or preventing the start of play)



**Fails to respect the required distance (ten yards) when other team's taking a free kick or corner kick or (two yards) taking a throw-in**  
(this used to be called "encroachment")

**Player entering or re-entering the field without the permission of the referee**



**Player leaving the field without the permission of the referee (except as part of normal play)**



# 7 Misconducts/Violations which can result in a send off (red card) are:

**Serious foul play**  
(using violence while committing a direct free kick foul and competing for the ball)



**Violent conduct**  
(any other form of violence against anyone else)

**Spitting**  
at someone



**Preventing a goal by handling the ball**  
(except the goalkeeper within the defending team's penalty area)

**Preventing a goal or interfering**  
with a clear goal-scoring chance by committing a foul



**Using offensive, insulting, or abusive language or gestures**

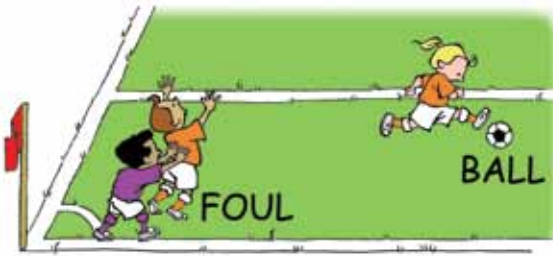
**Being cautioned a second time in the same game**  
(The yellow card is shown for the second caution and then the red card is shown)





## Law 12 Fouls and Misconduct

If play is stopped for a foul



committed by a player  
on the field



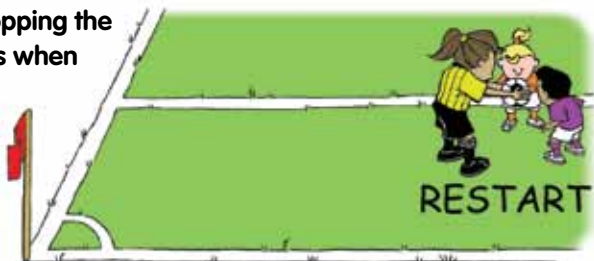
play is restarted with a  
free kick for the other  
team where the foul  
happened.

If play is stopped for misconduct

committed **off the field**  
by a player  
or



play is restarted by dropping the  
ball where the ball was when  
play was stopped.



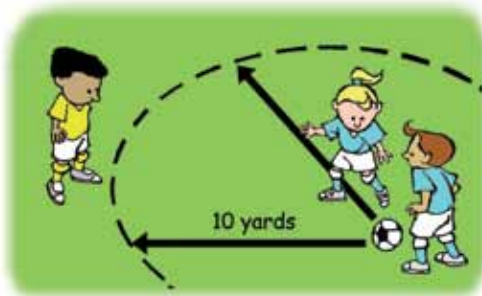
If play is stopped for misconduct on the field by a player and  
there wasn't a foul, the restart is an indirect free kick where the miscon-  
duct occurred.



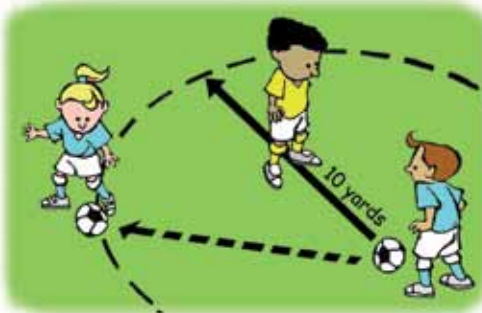
A free kick is a way to start play again after a violation of the Law a misconduct or a foul. The free kick takes place where the foul or misconduct happened (see Special Rules #2 and #3 on page 41 for exceptions).

A goal can be scored directly from a direct free kick but only against the opponents. (Remember: "directly" means that no one else has touched or played the ball.)

For any free kick, the ball is in play as soon as it is kicked (see Special Rule #1 on page 41 for an exception).



All players from the other team must be at least ten yards away from where the free kick is being taken. (See Special Rule #4 on page 41 for an exception.)



The kicking team can decide to go ahead and take a kick anyway even if there are opponents closer than ten yards.

An opponent who gets too close and interferes with or delays the taking of a free kick can be cautioned for misconduct and shown the yellow card.





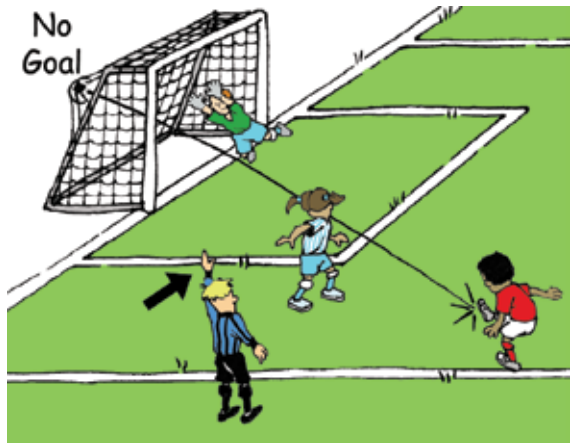


**Not OK**



The player taking the free kick cannot touch the ball again unless another player has touched it (an indirect free kick is given to the other team if this happens).

A goal cannot be scored directly from an indirect free kick (the ball has to touch at least one other player on either team before entering the net for the goal to count).



The referee signals an indirect free kick by raising an arm straight overhead. The referee keeps the arm raised until the ball is touched by another player or leaves the field of play.

It is still an indirect free kick even if the referee forgets to do this.





### Special Rule #1

If a free kick is given to defenders inside their penalty area, the ball is not in play until it leaves the penalty area. All opponents must be outside the penalty area when the kick is taken.

### Special Rule #2

If an indirect free kick is given to the attackers inside the defender's goal area, the ball is placed on the goal area line closest to where the foul or misconduct occurred.

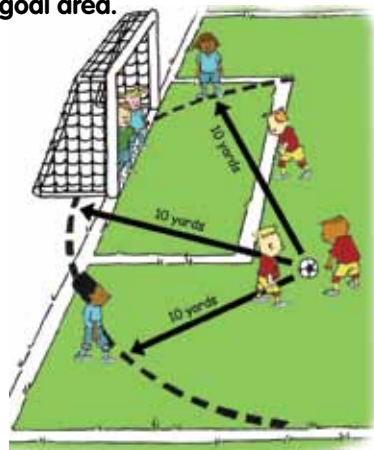


### Special Rule #3:

If a free kick is given to defenders inside their goal area, the ball can be placed on the ground anywhere in the goal area.

### Special Rule #4:

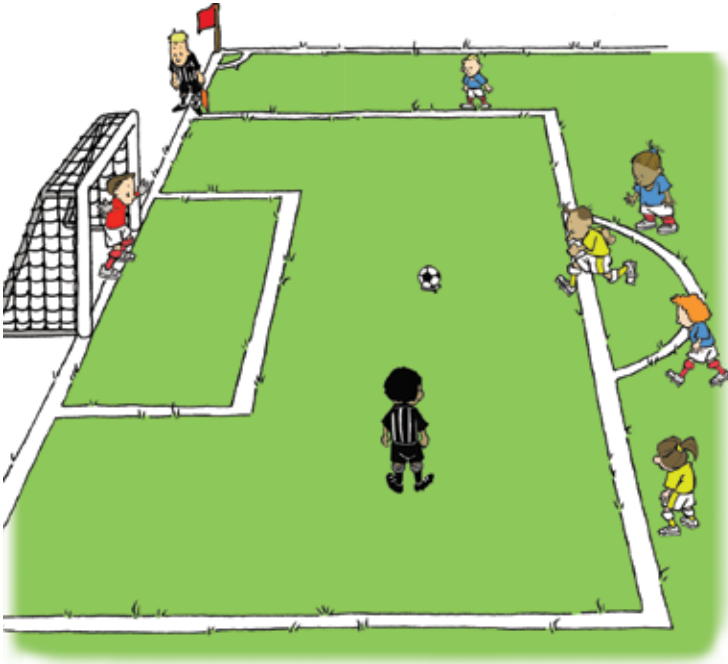
Opponents can be closer than 10 yards to a free kick if they are standing on their own goal line between the goal posts.





## Law 14 The Penalty Kick

A penalty kick is the way to start play again after a defender commits a direct free kick foul inside the defending team's penalty area.



The referee signals for the kick to be taken after:

- The ball is placed on the penalty mark
- The defending goalkeeper is facing the field on the line between the goal posts
- The kicker is identified
- Everyone else is outside the penalty area and outside the penalty arc and behind the ball



The ball must be kicked forward to be in play.

Until the ball is kicked:

- The goalkeeper cannot move forward (but can move sideways)
- None of the other players can go into the penalty area or the penalty arc or move past the ball

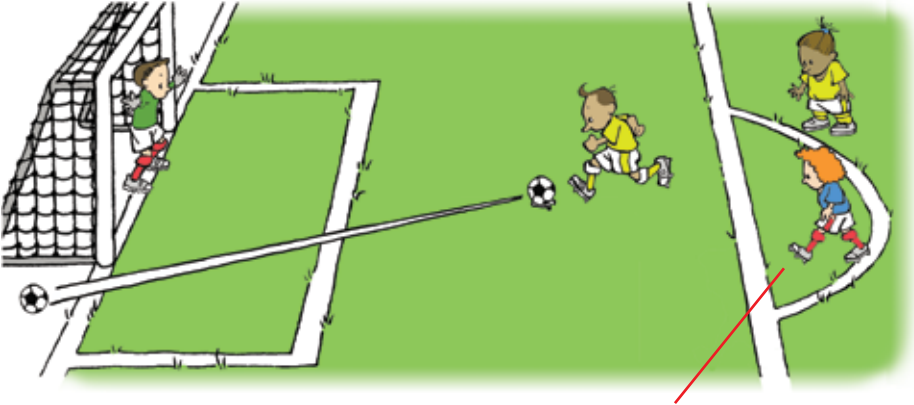




## Law 14 The Penalty Kick

The referee will order the penalty kick retaken if:

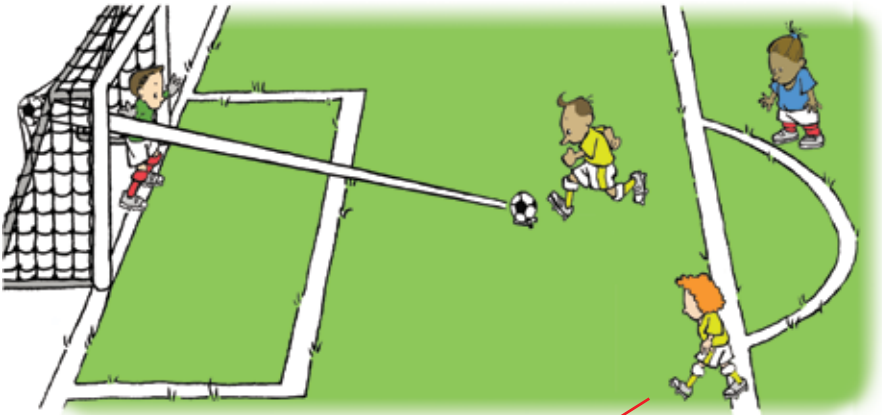
- A defender does something wrong and a goal was not scored



**Defender enters Pen-  
alty Area before kick  
is taken.**

**PK retaken.**

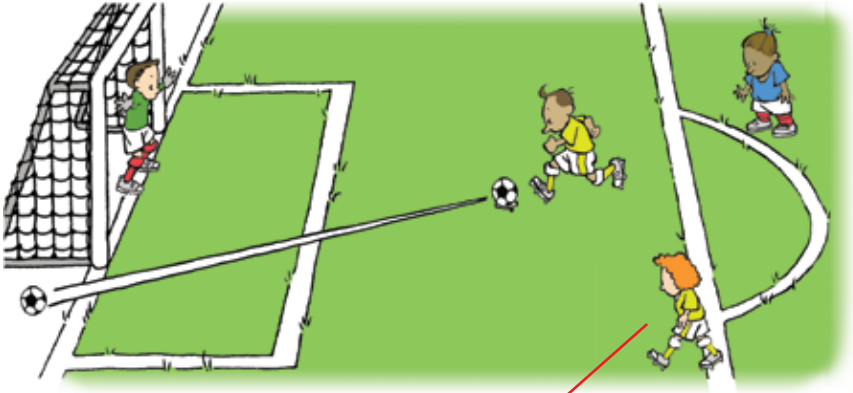
- An attacker does something wrong and a goal was scored



**Attacker enters Penalty  
Area before kick is taken.**

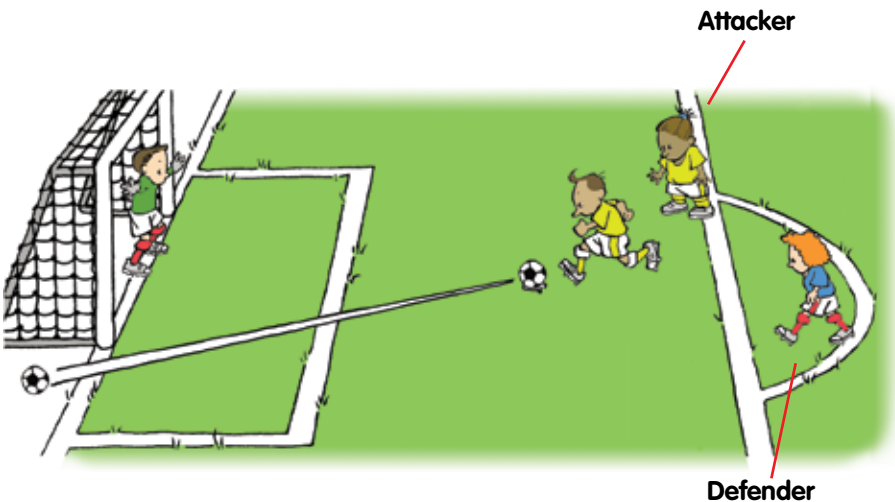
**PK retaken.**





**Attacker enters Penalty Area  
before kick is taken.  
Indirect Free Kick.**

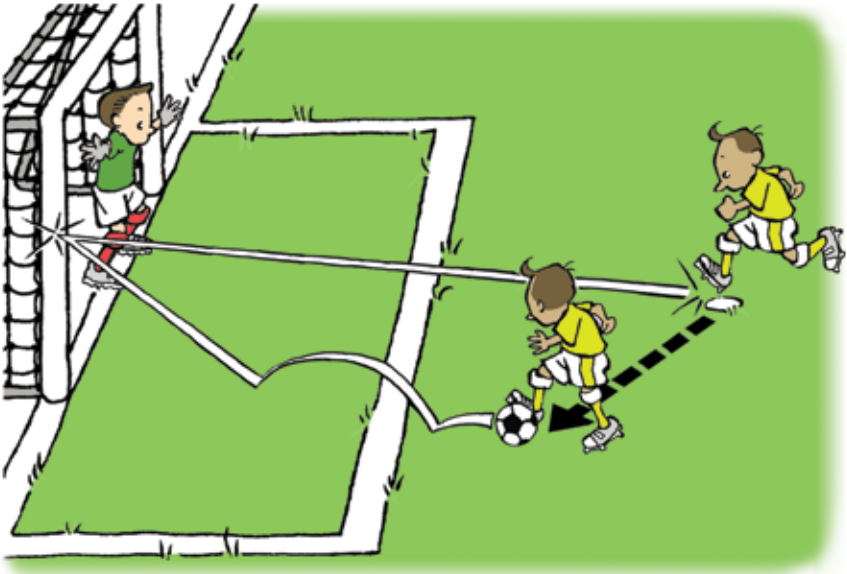
**If someone from each team does something wrong, the penalty kick is  
taken again.**





## Law 14 The Penalty Kick

A goal can be scored directly from a penalty kick.



The player taking the penalty kick cannot touch the ball a second time until another player has touched the ball (if this happens, an indirect free kick is given to the other team).



If there is a penalty kick in extra time, the half is over when the ball stops moving (the ball can bounce from any or all of the crossbar, a goal post, the ground, and the goalkeeper before going into the net).



A throw-in is the way to restart play when the ball leaves the field by completely crossing over a touch line. The team which did not touch the ball last takes the throw-in.

A throw-in must be taken where the ball left the field (within a yard of this spot).



The thrower stands off the field but a part of either or both feet can be on the field if at least some part of each foot is on the touch line or off the field.



**OK**

Both feet off the field and on the ground



**OK**

Both feet off the field or on the line and part of each foot is on the ground



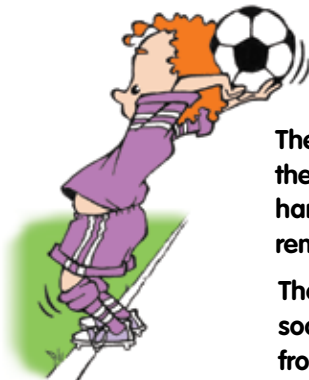
**Not OK**

One foot in the field of play



**Not OK**

One foot off the ground



The ball is thrown over the head using both hands while the feet remain on the ground.

The ball is in play as soon as it is released from the thrower's hands and enters the field.





## Law 15 The Throw-In



If the ball does not enter the field or hits the ground before entering the field, the throw-in is retaken.

If the throw-in is not performed correctly, the ball is given to the other team for a throw-in.

The main purpose of the throw-in is to get the ball back into play.



A goal cannot be scored directly from a throw-in.

If the ball goes directly into the thrower's own goal, play is restarted with a corner kick.

If the ball goes directly into the other team's goal, play is restarted with a goal kick.



The thrower cannot touch the ball again until it has been touched by another player (indirect free kick for the other team).



An opponent who distracts the thrower or interferes with the thrower must be cautioned and shown the yellow card for unsportsmanlike behavior.

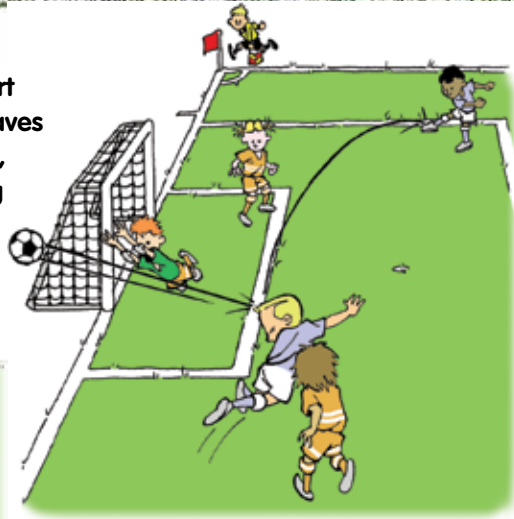
Examples of this might include an opponent jumping in front of the thrower or waving their hands about to prevent the throw from going in a particular direction.





## Law 16 The Goal Kick

A goal kick is the way to start play again when the ball leaves the field across the goal line, last touched by an attacking player.



The ball can be placed anywhere in the goal area.



The ball is in play when it leaves the penalty area into the field.

All opponents must stay outside the penalty area until the ball leaves the penalty area.

No one on either team can touch the ball until it is in play.

The goal kick is retaken if any of these requirements are not met.



The player taking the goal kick cannot touch the ball again until another player has touched the ball (an indirect free kick is given to the other team).



A goal can be scored directly from a goal kick, but only against the other team.



**Not a Goal!**

A team cannot score an own goal from a goal kick (goal kick must be retaken)





## Law 17 The Corner Kick

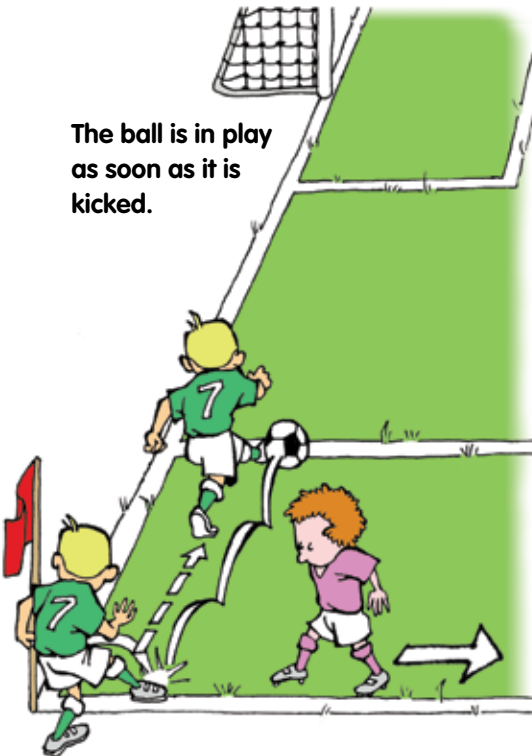


A corner kick is the way to restart play when the ball leaves the field across the goal line, last touched by a defending player.

The ball is placed inside the corner arc on the side of the field closer to where the ball went out.



The ball is in play as soon as it is kicked.



The player taking the corner kick cannot touch the ball again until another player has touched the ball. (An indirect free kick is given to the other team if this happens.)

All opponents must remain at least ten yards away from the corner arc until the ball is in play.



**A goal can be scored directly from a corner kick.**



**Players are not allowed to move the corner flag to take a corner kick.**





## Procedures to Determine the Winner of a Match

Although Law 10 says that games can end in a tie, in special cases (for example, in a tournament), the rules might require that a game cannot end in a tie in other words, one team must be declared a winner.

The Laws of the Game says there are two ways to break a tie. Either one or both of them can be used. During either procedure, except as may be noted below, all the Laws of the Game continue to apply.



### Overtime Periods

Teams can play two additional short periods of time. The length of these overtime periods must be specified in advance. Both periods are played in full whether a team scores a goal or not.

These two overtime periods are played just as though they were a short game. In other words, there is a coin toss to decide who kicks first and which team is at which end of the field. At the end of the first overtime period, the teams switch ends of the field after a suitable rest time (usually just a few minutes).

If the score is still tied at the end of the second overtime period, the game is either over and counted as a tie or the teams may be required to use "kicks from the penalty mark" to decide the winner.



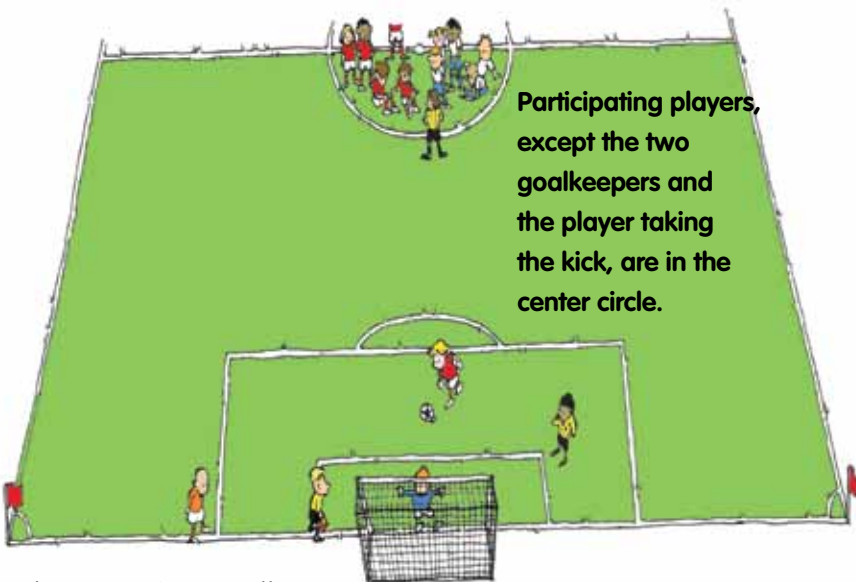


## Kicks from the Penalty Mark

The referee selects which goal will be used.

The team winning a coin toss gets to decide which team will kick first.

Only players on the field when regular (or overtime) play has ended can participate.



The opposing goalkeeper stands on the goal line where it meets the penalty area boundary line.

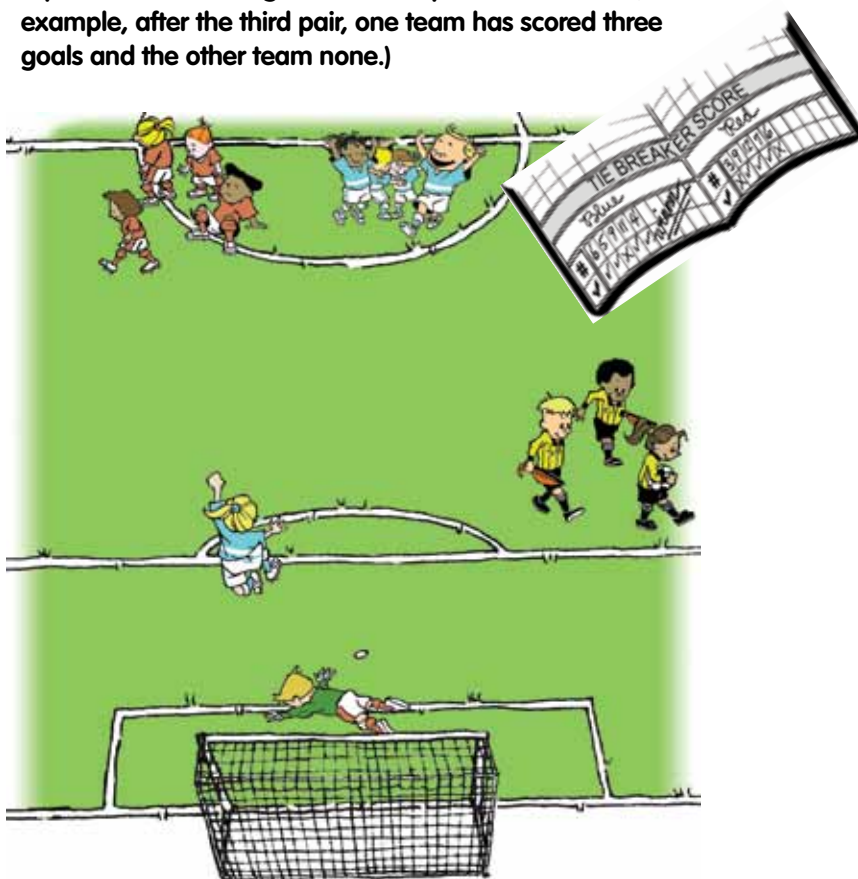
For the kicker and the defending goalkeeper, the Laws are also the same as for a penalty kick. However, once the kick is taken, no one other than the defending goalkeeper can play the ball.



No player from the same team may take a second kick from the penalty mark until all players on the team (including the goalkeeper) have kicked.

Kicks from the penalty mark are taken by one team and then the other team. An initial group of up to five pairs may decide the match. If, after the fifth pair, one team has scored more goals than the other team, that team wins.

At any time in this first set of five pairs, the taking of kicks is completed if it becomes impossible for one team to equal the number of goals scored by the other team. (For example, after the third pair, one team has scored three goals and the other team none.)



After the fifth pair, the teams take kicks from the penalty mark one pair at a time. The procedure ends if, after any pair, one team has scored a goal and the other team has not.