RECOGNIZING FOUL PLAY: A GUIDE FOR REFEREES
What gets a referee into problems?

• Inability to recognize fouls

What is a foul?
What is a foul?

The action must be committed by a player:

- While the ball is in play
- Against an opposing player **
- On the field of play
What is a foul?

** What is the only exception?

- Deliberate handling of the ball – because it is committed not against a particular opponent, but against the opposing team.
What is a foul?

The referee must make the decision based on:

• What the player intended to do?

• What he sees the player do?

Which?
Why are fouls committed?

Ten Major Reasons:

- Challenging for the ball
- Position: gain/prevent
- Delay the opponents
- Humiliation
- Frustration
- Retaliation
- Intimidation
- Score a goal unfairly
- Prevent a goal
- Take opponent out of game
Where/When are fouls committed?

- More than 60% of fouls are committed within 20 yards of the halfway line

- More fouls are committed in the second half than in the first half

- The winning team generally commits more fouls
Was the action “fair” or “unfair”?

Criteria for evaluating an incident:

S  speed
I  intent
A  aggressive nature
P  position of tackler
O  opportunity to play the ball
A  atmosphere
What does the referee look for?

- On set plays
- On breakaways
- Outside the penalty area
- On balls in the air
What does the referee look for?

On set plays:

Corner Kicks

- impeding of the goalkeeper
- holding
- pushing
- jumping in (crashing into the goalkeeper or a defender to score a goal)
What does the referee look for?

On set plays:

Goal Kicks

- referee must be at midfield to see pushing or holding in the back

Free kicks

- holding
- impeding (particularly of the goalkeeper; often missed)
- pushing
What does the referee look for?

On breakaways:

• holding by defenders to delay the attack
• pushing by attackers to gain position
• illegal charges
• deliberate handling of the ball (to delay the attack)
What does the referee look for?

Outside the penalty area:

- ill-timed or poorly-executed tackles
- the illegal move following the legal tackle, e.g., the player hooks the ball away and then uses his other leg to pull the opponent down
What does the referee look for?

**Balls in the air:**

- pushing an opponent
- jumping at an opponent (to intimidate) with no hope of playing the ball.

**Note:** Watch the player’s eyes. Failure to call this foul is widespread among youth referees.
How can the referee prevent fouls?

Through the use of preventive techniques:

1. Presence

2. Voice commands
Was the action “fair” or “unfair”?

Criteria for evaluating an incident:

- Attention of the player
- Skill of the player
- Moment before contact
- Player sounds
- Go with your first impression
- Be consistent
- Focus attention on the sequence of the action (before, during, after)
But how can I help myself?

By using an analytical framework to evaluate each incident
Analyzing the incident

Was it a foul?  Yes or No?

If YES, was it called?  Yes or No?

If NO, what are the possibilities?
What are the possibilities?

1. I did not see it
2. I saw it but did not recognize it
3. I saw it but did not have the courage to call it
4. I saw it as a trifling foul; no call
5. I saw it, determined advantage, and called it
What are the possibilities?

1. I did not see it.  
   Poor positioning  
   How do I fix it?  
   Better Positioning - Read the Play
What are the possibilities?

2. I saw it, but did not recognize it.

   WHY?

   Poor instruction

   How do I fix it?

   Watch other referees, games, etc.
What are the possibilities?

3. I saw it but didn’t have the courage to call it.

WHY?

Penalty situation

How do I fix it?

Confidence
What are the possibilities?

4. I saw it as a trifling foul; no call.

So what’s the problem here?

The less skilled the teams, the less likely they will consider the foul to be trivial.
What are the possibilities?

5. I saw it, determined advantage, and called it.

So what’s the problem here?

It wasn’t an advantage situation!

How do I fix it?

Understanding
What have we learned?

1. What constitutes a foul
2. Ten major reasons fouls are committed
3. Where/when fouls are committed
4. Two preventive techniques
5. How to evaluate an act (fair or unfair)
6. An analytical framework
Why are fouls committed?

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Criteria/Guide

To Assist The Referee in making the Appropriate Call:

S  speed
I  intent
A  aggressive nature
P  position of tackler
O  opportunity to play the ball
A  atmosphere

Brain Teaser #1

A player tackles an opponent with excessive force, endangering the safety of the opponent. What action should the referee take?

A. Caution and show the guilty player a yellow card
B. Send off and show the guilty player a red card
C. Show a yellow card and then send off the player by showing a red card
D. For this incident neither a caution nor a send-off is directed by the Laws of the Game
Brain Teaser #2

What are fouls that break up promising attacks or prevent the opponent from getting the ball into advantageous positions called?

A. Trifling
B. Tactical
C. Ticktack
D. None of the above
Brain Teaser #3

What type of challenges most frequently involve contact above the shoulder?

A. Aerial
B. Tactical
C. Excessive force
D. Tackles from behind