

U.S. Soccer Federation



Guide to Procedures

Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials

United States Soccer Federation

Foreward

The United States Soccer Federation adopts the procedures outlined in this pamphlet in order to standardize officiating techniques, signals and mechanics at all levels of play. They have been recommended by a panel of senior referees and instructors and have been thoroughly tested at international, professional, amateur and youth levels of competition.

Alternate signals, procedures and methods of communication among referees, assistant referees and fourth officials are not authorized for games under the jurisdiction of the United States Soccer Federation using the diagonal system of control. Other signals or methods of communication intended to supplement those described here are permitted only if they do not conflict with established procedures and only if they do not intrude on the game, are not distracting, are limited in number and purpose and are carefully described by the referee prior to the commencement of a match.



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General Mechanics

- It is the job of the referee, assistant referees and fourth official to perform their responsibilities as efficiently, effectively and unobtrusively as possible. While every official must develop his or her own style of conduct, it is the objective of this Procedures Guide to keep such individual styles within a common boundary of standard practices.
- An official's style should not interfere with the flow of the game, result in unclear communication of information to players or fellow officials, or cause undue attention to be drawn to the official and away from the match itself.
- Referees are reminded that the whistle is a tool of communication and not merely a convenient signaling device. Whistles should be selected carefully for the match conditions, age of players and other factors. It is neither required nor expected that the whistle be used for all stoppages and restarts of play.
- A whistle demands attention and should be blown when such attention is needed. Uncontested stoppages (as when a ball clearly leaves the field) should not be whistled – a voice and/or hand signal by the referee or a flag by the assistant referee will normally be sufficient.
- Referees should also be alert to the need for variations in the length, force and tone of their use of a whistle to indicate different types of stoppages or different degrees of concern for the event that has just occurred.
- In the diagonal system of control, referees should take every opportunity of less activity on the field to make eye contact with each of the assistant referees, to confirm the location of players relative to the officials and to observe portions of the field which may not have received recent attention.
- All referee hand signals are given with the arm straight at the indicated angle or direction, with the fingers fully extended. Assistant referee flag signals follow the same pattern with the flag held as an extension of the arm.



Game Mechanics

1. Prior To The Game

A. Arrival At The Field

- Referee, assistant referees and fourth official are expected to be at the field at the time prescribed by the rules of competition, but at least 30 minutes prior to kick-off.

B. Inspections

- Referee, assistant referees and fourth official carefully inspect field to determine adequacy of markings, safety and general playing conditions.
- Fourth official obtains and inspects the game balls.

C. Pre-Game Instructions

- Referee, assistant referees and fourth official discuss any special expectations, unusual field or match conditions, special rules of competition (e.g., substitutions, ties) and signals or procedures other than those described in this Guide.

D. Fifteen Minutes Before Kick-off

- Senior assistant referee and fourth official inspect player equipment, player passes and team rosters.



E. Prior to Kick-off

- Referee, assistant referees and fourth official enter field together and move to center mark for National Anthem.
- Referee carries match ball, introduces officiating team to captains and conducts coin toss.
- Assistant referees have flags furled.
- Officials record results of coin toss.
- Assistant referees perform final check of nets and move to touch lines to take the offside position.
- Fourth official goes to his position between the team benches and begins his administrative duties.



F. One Minute Before Kick-off

- Assistant referees unfurl flags and hold them straight down in view of the referee to signal readiness to start.

G. Thirty Seconds Before Kick-off

- Referee supervises the clearing of the field.
- Makes eye contact with each assistant referee and fourth official to ensure readiness.

2. Kick-off

- Referee reads the players' positioning to determine exactly where to stand, starts watch when the ball is kicked and moves forward.
- Assistant referees are in position with the second to last defender.

3. During Play

A. General Positioning

Referee

- Position flexible, using the diagonal system of control.
- Referee's discretion on choice of diagonal and degree of flexibility.

Assistant Referee

- Assistant referees in line with second to last defender or the ball, whichever is closer to the goal line.
- Flag held straight down and always visible to referee.
- Side-to-side movement, square to the field, unless speed is needed.
- Before signaling, stop, face field and make eye contact with referee.

B. Goalkeeper Possession/Punt

Referee

- At the position to observe where the ball is anticipated to drop.

Assistant Referee

- Verifies the goalkeeper does not handle the ball outside of the penalty area.
- Follows the ball up field to cover offside (may begin moving earlier if obvious that the goalkeeper is not in a position to handle the ball outside the penalty area).

C. Throw-in, Referee's End of Touch Line

Referee

- Signals stoppage of play (whistle only if necessary).
- Points 45 degrees upward to indicate direction of throw-in.
- Indicates correct location for restart.
- Variable position, including where needed being ahead of the throw-in and off the field (over the touch line or goal line) if location is deep or throw is expected to be long.



Assistant Referee

- Signals with a vertical flag in the appropriate hand (if necessary.)
- Direction of throw-in indicated by the hand in which the flag is held.

D. Throw-in, Assistant Referee's End of Touch Line

Referee

- Whistles to stop play only if necessary; points in direction of throw-in only if correction or confirmation needed.

Assistant Referee

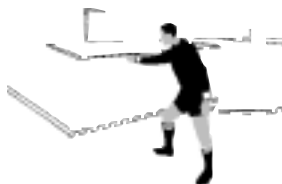
- Signals with flag 45 degrees upward in the direction of the throw-in.
- If the ball passes out of play and immediately returns to the field, signals with a vertical flag until acknowledged by the referee, then flags in the direction of the throw-in.
- Drops flag when it is clear that restart and direction are established.
- Maintains the offside position, unless in the way of the thrower, if so moves slightly toward the goal.
- Supervises throw-in elements per pre-game instructions.



E. Goal Kick

Referee

- Signals stoppage of play (whistle only if necessary).
- Points to the goal area.
- Takes a position down the field near where the ball is likely to be played.



Assistant Referee

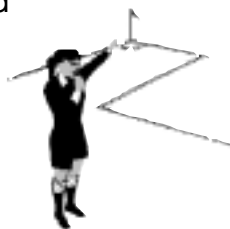
- Points flag horizontally toward goal area.
- If the ball passes out of play and immediately returns to the field, signals with a vertical flag until acknowledged by the referee, then points flag horizontally toward goal area.
- Moves to top of goal area to check for proper placement of ball.
- Moves to top of penalty area, when needed, to verify that ball is properly put into play and that attackers do not encroach into penalty area.
- If the keeper is taking the goal kick, moves to a position to judge offside.



F. Corner Kick, Referee's Side of Field

Referee

- Signals stoppage of play (if necessary).
- Points to the corner.
- Ensures that the ball is properly placed within the corner arc.
- Deals with any failure to respect the required distance.



Assistant Referee

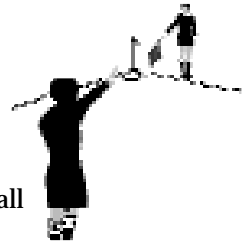
- Signals only if referee makes eye contact to ask for assistance.
- Moves to the near corner and takes position on the goal line behind the flag.
- If the ball passes out of play and immediately returns to the field, signals with a vertical flag until acknowledged by the referee, then points flag 45 degrees downward toward the near corner.



G. Corner Kick, Assistant Referee's Side of Field

Referee

- Whistles to stop the game, if necessary.
- Points 45 degrees upward toward the correct corner.



Assistant Referee

- Raises the flag vertically to get the referee's attention in cases where the ball left the field and quickly returned.
- Points the flag 45 degrees downward in the direction of the near corner.
- Ensures that the ball is properly placed.
- Takes a position even with the goal line, out of the way of players.
- Following the kick, recovers the offside position as quickly as possible.

H. Goal

Referee

- Checks visually with the assistant referee.
- Points upfield to the center circle.
- Backpedals toward center circle and keeps players under observation.
- Prevents unnecessarily prolonged celebration.
- Intervenes in situations in which players or bench personnel confront assistant referees.
- Records goal when in position for kick-off.
- Makes eye contact with both assistant referees before signaling for the kick-off to occur.

Lead Assistant Referee

- Checks visually with the referee.
- Runs a short distance up the touch line toward the halfway line to affirm to the referee that a goal has been scored
- Keeps moving to avoid confrontation if approached.
- Observes the resulting player behavior and the actions in and around the penalty area.
- Takes up the offside position.
- Keeps players under observation at all times.
- Records the goal after the trail assistant referee has recorded it.

Trail Assistant Referee

- Records the goal while the referee and lead assistant referee are returning to their positions for the restart.
- Observes players while the referee and lead assistant referee make notes.
- Keeps moving to avoid confrontation if approached.

Fourth Official

- Controls the bench area and records goal.

I. Goal, Ball Comes Back Into Field of Play

Referee

- Looks to the assistant referee for assistance.

Assistant Referee

- Raises the flag vertically to get the referee's attention.
- When the referee stops play, puts flag straight down, runs a short distance up the touch line toward the halfway line.
- Follows the remaining mechanics for a goal.



J. Offside

Referee

- Acknowledges the assistant referee's signal by stopping play or by waving down the flag to indicate play should continue.
- If offside is called, gives an indirect free kick signal when it is appropriate to do so, indicates the restart.
- Holds the indirect free kick signal from the moment of the restart to when the ball is touched or played by another player or until play is stopped for another reason.

Assistant Referee

- Raises the flag vertically.
- If the referee misses the flag, stays at attention with the flag raised until the defense gains clear possession or until a goal kick or throw-in is awarded to the defense.
- Indicates the location of the offense by dropping the flag at an appropriate angle to a point in the field (far, middle, near side).

K. Apparent Goal to be Disallowed

Referee

- Checks visually with the assistant referee.
- Decides on action after considering information from the assistant referee.
- Signals the correct restart.
- Goes to the appropriate referee position for this restart.

Assistant Referee

- Stands in place.
- Signals the referee according to the situation.
- If the *scorer was offside* at the moment the ball was passed to him or her, **signals offside**.
- If there was a *foul by an attacker*, stands at **attention with no flag signal**.
- If a player *other than the scorer was in an offside position* and, in the opinion of the assistant referee, was *interfering with play or with an opponent*, stands at **attention with no flag signal**.
- Assumes the proper position for the restart indicated by the referee.

L. Foul Observed by the Referee

Referee

- Stops the game with a whistle.
- Moves to the spot of the foul if necessary to prevent possible retaliation or misconduct.
- Makes eye contact with the lead assistant referee for assistance with determining if a defender inside the penalty area committed the infringement.
- Indicates the direction of the free kick.
- Ensures that the ball is properly placed.
- Allows a quick free kick, except where this is prevented or interfered with by an opponent's failure to respect the required distance.
- In cases where the restart is interfered with, clearly indicates that a separate signal is now required for the restart and then deals with the interference.
- If the kick is indirect, gives the appropriate hand signal for the restart and holds the hand signal until the ball has been touched or played by another player or goes out of play.
- Signals for the restart.

Assistant Referee

- Responds to eye contact by the referee requesting assistance regarding the location of the foul either by making no discernible signal (to indicate that the infringement occurred outside the penalty area) or by holding the flag straight downward in front of the body (to indicate that the infringement was committed by the defense inside the penalty area).



M. Fouls Not Seen by Referee, But Indicated by Lead Assistant Referee

Referee

- Acknowledges the assistant referee's signal by stopping play, calling advantage, or waving down the signal to indicate that play should continue.
- If play is stopped for the foul, indicates the direction of the free kick and ensures that the free kick is taken properly.
- Confers with assistant referee, if necessary, to confirm the nature of the infringement (keeps field in view while moving to touch line and while conferring).

Lead Assistant Referee

- Determines that the infringement was not or could not be seen by the referee.
- Signals with the flag raised vertically in the hand appropriate for the restart direction and, upon making eye contact with the referee, gives the flag a slight wave.
- If the referee stops play, signals with the flag held 45 degrees upward in the direction of the restart if the foul was committed by any player outside of the penalty area or by an attacker inside the penalty area.
- Moves directly to goal line to assume the position for a penalty kick if a defender inside the penalty area committed the foul.
- Indicates the location of the restart if necessary.



N. Fouls/Misconduct Indicated by the Trail Assistant Referee

Referee

- Stops the game with a whistle.
- Confers with the trail assistant referee, if necessary, to determine nature of the occurrence. While moving to confer, referee keeps field in view.
- Deals with the incident as appropriate.
- Indicates the location and direction of the restart.
- Signals for the restart and ensures that the free kick is taken properly.

Trail Assistant Referee

- Signals with the flag raised vertically and, upon making eye contact with the referee, gives the flag a slight wave.

Lead Assistant Referee

- If the referee does not see the trail assistant referee's signal, the lead assistant referee mirrors the flag signal and, upon making eye contact with the referee, directs his attention to the trail assistant referee.

O. Play On, Advantage Applied

Referee

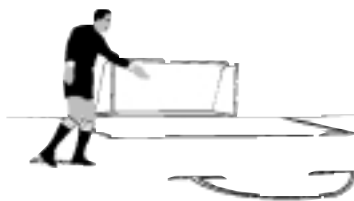
- Declares distinctly “Play on!” or “Advantage!” and moves both hands forward in a sweeping motion at waist level.
- Avoids an advantage signal when an incident has been observed which is judged not to be a foul (or a trifling or doubtful foul).



P. Penalty Kick

Referee

- Whistles to stop play.
- Points clearly to the penalty mark and, unless needed elsewhere for game control purposes, moves to the edge of the penalty area near the goal line to avoid confrontation and dissent.
- Deals with players who may attempt to protest or dispute the decision.
- Supervises the placement of the ball.
- Identifies the kicker.
- Moves to a position in line with the top of the goal area to supervise the penalty kick, far enough from the penalty mark to see all the players.
- When the ball and all the players are properly in position, signals for the kick to be taken.
- If a goal is scored, backpedals quickly up field keeping all the players under observation.



Assistant Referee

- Moves quickly to the intersection of the goal line and the penalty area and prepares for the duties assigned by the referee in the pre-game.
- If a goal is scored, resumes the position to judge offside, keeps players under observation and follows the normal goal procedure.
- If play continues, quickly resumes the position to judge offside (cutting the corner of the field if necessary) and keeps play in view.

Q. Penalty Kick Indicated by the Lead Assistant Referee

Referee

- Stops the game.
- Points clearly to the penalty mark.
- Follows the normal procedures for a penalty kick.

Lead Assistant Referee

- Signals with a flag straight up.
- Upon making eye contact with the referee, gives the flag a slight wave.
- If referee stops game, assistant referee walks to the corner flag and stands in front of the flag.

4. Misconduct–Play Stopped

A. Referee

- Quickly identifies and begins moving toward offending player and beckons player to approach.
- Attempts to draw offending player away from teammates and opponents.
- Discourages others from approaching, interfering or participating.
- Stops a reasonable distance away from offending player and begins recording necessary information.
- States clearly and concisely that the player is being cautioned or sent from the field and displays the appropriate card by holding it straight overhead.
- If the player is being sent off, delays the restart of play until the player has left the field entirely.
- In situations where the event or conduct being penalized includes the potential for retaliation or further misconduct, immediately moves to the location of the misconduct and displays the appropriate card before recording any information.

B. Assistant Referees

- Prevent others on or off the field from interfering with the referee's procedures.
- Record any pertinent information to assist with subsequent reporting of the misconduct.
- Monitor the departure from the field of a player sent off.

C. Fourth Official

- Monitors the further removal from the area of the field (in accordance with the rules of the competition) of a player sent off.

5. Substitutions

A. Referee

- Indicates that the restart will be delayed for the substitution.
- When the player has left the field, beckons on the substitute.
- Adds time as appropriate for excessive delay in performing the substitution.

B. Assistant Referee

- Gives the substitution signal and holds it until eye contact is made with the referee.
- When acknowledged by the referee, lowers the flag.
- When no fourth official is present, the assistant referee comes to the halfway line to supervise, if so instructed in pre-game.
- Ensures that the substitute does not enter the field until the player being replaced has left the field.



C. Fourth Official

- Inspects substitute's equipment.
- Collects substitute's pass and substitution ticket and verifies the information.
- Informs near assistant referee of substitution request.
- Stands behind halfway line flag with substitute until referee signals for substitution.
- Displays numbers of players to be substituted.
- Prevents substitute from entering field until player being substituted has left the field.
- Records the game time of the substitution.



6. Timing

A. Referee

- Makes eye contact with assistant referees for indication.

B. Assistant Referee

- Indicates last 5 minutes with appropriate number of fingers pointing downward against the background of the shorts.
- Time expired, closed fist on the shorts.
- If the referee has difficulty seeing this signal, moves the fist to the chest (arm across the chest).

7. End of the Game

A. Referee

- Signals with the whistle.
- Points up field to the center circle.
- Secures the game ball.
- Supervises the departure of the teams from the field.

B. Assistant Referees

- May secure the game ball if closer to it than the referee.
- Join the referee on the field.
- Flags are furled.

C. Referee and Assistant Referees

- Keep players and team officials under observation at all times.
- Leave the field as a team after the teams have departed or have otherwise ceased all competitive activities.

D. Fourth Official

- Collects equipment and proceeds to the locker room or joins the referee and assistant referees off the field.



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