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Subject: **When Defenders Leave the Field**

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A more definitive interpretation of Law 11 (Offside) was circulated this year by the International Board as part of its annual notice of Law changes and clarifications. This has led to some discussion among referees, players, and coaches regarding how this interpretation should be implemented in different game situations involving a defender leaving the field during play across the goal line or touch line. The following scenarios should be considered:

- During the normal course of play. The critical issue is whether, in the opinion of the referee, the defender's action was a normal part of play. For example, the defender left briefly to get around an opponent or the defender's momentum necessarily resulted in crossing the goal line or touchline. In this case, no violation has occurred and the defender is expected to return to the field without undue delay. The permission of the referee is not required.
- Attempting to create an offside situation. If, in the opinion of the referee, the defender left the field with the intention of placing an attacker in an apparent offside position (by changing the determination of which teammates are the last and second to last defenders), this is a violation of the Law and a form of misconduct (leaving the field without the permission of the referee). However, play should normally be allowed to continue but the defender off the field is considered to be on the closest point of the boundary line for purposes of determining an attacker's offside position. Thus, if the defender on the field closest to the goal line is the goalkeeper standing a few feet from the goal line and the defender left the field across the goal line, that defender is, in effect, considered to be on the goal line as the last defender and the goalkeeper has become the second to last defender.

- Misconduct. When a defender has committed misconduct by leaving the field in an attempt to place an attacker in an offside position, the referee's normal course of action is to allow play to continue but to caution the defender when the ball goes next out of play. However, **it is not necessary to wait for the ball to leave the field**. The next stoppage of play could occur in a number of ways – a foul or a serious injury or the expiration of time, for example. The referee could also whistle to stop play solely because the attacking team no longer controls the ball (e.g., a shot on goal by the attacker is saved and held by the goalkeeper). In this case, the stoppage is due solely to misconduct by a player off the field: after showing the yellow card, the restart would be an indirect free kick for the opposing team where the ball was when play was stopped by the referee.