



To: State Referee Administrators
State Directors of Referee Instruction
State Directors of Referee Assessment
Chair, State Referee Committee
National Referees, Assessors and Instructors

From: Alfred Kleinaitis
Manager of Referee Development and Education

Re: **Law 11 – Offside**
IFAB advice on the application of Law 11, Decision 2

Date: August 24, 2005

The International Football Association Board (IFAB) revised Law 11 (Offside) effective 1 July 2005 by, among other things, incorporating definitions of what it means to “interfere with play,” “interfere with an opponent,” and “gain an advantage by being in an offside position.” The **USSF Advice to Referees** section of Memorandum 2005 ended its discussion of the addition of these three definitions by noting:

Referees are reminded that the reference to “playing or touching the ball” does not mean that an offside infraction cannot be called until an attacker in an offside position actually touches the ball.

Because of recent developments which appear to focus on “touching the ball,” there has been some confusion about the above statement. **“Touching the ball” is not a requirement for calling an offside violation if the attacker is interfering with an opponent by making a movement or gesture which, in the opinion of the referee, deceives or distracts that opponent.** What the International Board has recently emphasized is that, in the unlikely event an attacker in an offside position is not challenged by any opponent, the attacker should not be ruled offside unless and until the attacker physically touches the ball.

This emphasis is both simple and easily implemented:

- An attacker in an offside position who is not challenged by any opponent and not competing for the ball with a teammate coming from an onside position who could, in the opinion of the officiating team, get to the ball first should not be ruled offside for interfering with play or gaining an advantage unless that attacker actually

touches the ball. In a close race between an onside and an offside attacker, it would be necessary to see which player touches the ball before deciding if an offside offense has occurred.

- An attacker in an offside position whose gestures or movements, in the opinion of the officiating team, cause an opponent to challenge for the ball has interfered with an opponent and should be ruled offside whether the attacker touches the ball or not.

The International Board issued a Circular on August 17, 2005, which reaffirmed the above approach. As the Board stated (emphasis added): “A player in an offside position may be penalized before playing or touching the ball if, in the opinion of the referee, no other teammate in an onside position has the opportunity to play the ball.” Further, “If an opponent becomes involved in the play and if, in the opinion of the referee, there is potential for physical contact, the player in the offside position shall be penalized for interfering with an opponent.” Finally, the Board confirmed the requirement that the indirect free kick restart for an offside offense is taken “from the initial place where the player was adjudged to be in an offside position.”

All referees, instructors, and assessors should review these guidelines carefully. It is important that officials understand and handle the offside offense in a correct, consistent, and realistic manner. Personal interpretations which differ from the approach outlined here can only cause confusion and hard feelings on the part of players, team officials, and spectators.

USSF will shortly distribute to the state associations and place on its website a PowerPoint presentation incorporating this clarification.