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Subject: **Deception at the Taking of a Penalty Kick**

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In 2000, the International Board clarified its guideline regarding what the player taking a penalty kick may do to confuse or deceive the defending goalkeeper. Most recently, the new “interpretations” section of the Law book states:

Feinting to take a penalty kick to confuse an opponent is permitted However, if, in the opinion of the referee, the feinting is considered an act of unsporting behavior, the player must be cautioned.

In explaining its new stance in 2000, the International Board noted that various forms of deception are allowed at a free kick restart and, in many respects (including this one), a penalty kick is similar to a free kick.

What is the line between acceptable “feinting” and unacceptable “unsporting behavior”? In essence, it is “the opinion of the referee” -- informed by the specific circumstances of the kicker’s actions and the referee’s “feel” for the match at that point.

However, referees should keep in mind that USSF has previously provided three specific examples of behavior by the identified kicker which are not acceptable, i.e., which cross the line into unacceptable unsporting behavior:

- Running past the ball and then stepping backward to perform the kick
- Excessively changing directions or taking an excessively long run to the ball (thus causing an unnecessary delay in the restart, in the opinion of the referee)
- Making a hand or arm gesture which obviously distracts or deceives the goalkeeper

At the same time, referees should evaluate the behavior of the player taking the kick in terms of what would and would not be acceptable at the taking of a free kick. An action which clearly is consistent with acceptable behavior while taking a free kick should be considered as falling within the category of acceptable “feigning” where the restart is a penalty kick.

The gray area in between must be decided firmly and quickly by the referee. The attached clip from a Confederations Cup match between DC United and Firpo (August 4, 2009) involves such a decision. The kicker’s action was not clearly one of the prohibited behaviors nor can it be said that, if the player had been taking a free kick, the brief “stutter” would have been deemed anything other than acceptable deception. Accordingly, the kicker’s action was not a violation of Law 14 and the resulting goal was properly allowed to stand.