



MEMORANDUM SUPPLEMENT 2008

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Background

USSF published several months ago its annual memorandum outlining the changes in the Laws of the Game approved by the International Board at its meeting earlier this year. The International Board, in a Circular announcing the Law changes, noted that, apart from these formal changes in substance (which were rather few in number), the language of the Law had been revised in several places effective this year.

These revisions were intended to clarify and simplify the Law in certain areas and to include specific language on some matters which had previously been commonly or traditionally understood but not found in the Law itself. Finally, the section which had been titled "Additional Instructions and Guidelines" in the 2007 Laws of the Game was being revised and renamed "Interpretations of the Laws of the Game and Guidelines for Referees" (referred to below simply as "Interpretations").

The USSF memorandum was published before the language revisions were available for review and thus the memorandum could not identify any such revisions which might need further clarification. That is the purpose of this Supplement to Memorandum 2008.

Note that the new "Interpretations" section is not included in the Lawbook for 2008 published by USSF. However, this important document can be found at and downloaded from USSF's website.

Revisions in the Language of the Laws of the Game

Law 1

Previously, optional marks outside the field at ten yards from the corner arc (intended to assist with managing opponents failing to respect the required distance on a corner kick) were allowed only off the goal line. They are now also permitted off the touchlines as well. The field diagrams in Law 1 and elsewhere have been adjusted to show this change.

Law 4

Although traditionally and commonly understood, the Law now specifies that teams are required to wear jersey colors that distinguish them from the other team and from the officials.

Law 5

The "Powers and Duties" of the referee previously included a statement that the referee was required to "restart the match after it has been stopped." This was often misunderstood by new referees to mean that the referee could not end a period of play during a stoppage of the game. Law 5 now clearly states that the referee "indicates the restart of the match after it has been stopped."

Law 6

In prior years, Law 6 had stated that the assistant referee (AR) should indicate offenses whenever the AR was "closer to the action than the referee" and this was taken by some officials to mean that the basis for a signal by the AR was solely a matter of distance. The 2008 revision of this language makes it clear that the AR should signal when that official has a "better view" of the offense.

Law 12

For many years, the "fouls" section of Law 12 had been divided into two groups: direct free kick offenses and indirect free kick offenses. The ten direct free kick offenses were further divided into two subgroups of six (where the issue was whether the action was careless, reckless, or involving excessive force) and a group of four. The indirect free kick offenses were simply listed.

The 2008 version of Law 12 has reorganized the offenses as follows:

- There are still ten direct free kick fouls but they are now divided into a subgroup of seven - still based on careless, reckless, or excessive force -- and the expanded group now includes "tackles an opponent".
- The offense in the second subgroup in 2007 which could be summarized as "making contact with the opponent before contacting the ball" has been dropped but should be considered as now incorporated in the tackling offense. The new second subgroup consists of the remaining three fouls from 2007.
- The indirect free kick offenses are now formally divided into a group of four which can only be committed by a goalkeeper and another four which may be committed by anyone (including the goalkeeper).

Law 12

The International Board has reconfirmed this year, by making no change in the list of reasons for which a substitute or substituted player may be cautioned, that a substitute or substituted player who illegally enters the field is to be cautioned for unsporting behavior.

Law 15

Although USSF noted originally that referees were to use two yards as an alternative minimum distance for opponents on a throw-in, Law 15 now specifically accepts this distance as equivalent to the original two meter restriction.

Revisions in the “Interpretations”

(Note: several of the items below also appeared in the 2007 “Additional Instructions and Guidelines” but were not specifically remarked upon in last year’s annual Law change memorandum)

Law 3

Member associations (e.g., national governing bodies such as USSF) may now allow for fewer than seven players for a match to continue but seven remains the minimum number required for a match to begin. In the absence of a future policy announcement from USSF to the contrary, seven will remain the minimum number needed to start or continue a match. It is not, however, required to abandon a match if the number of players drops below seven temporarily and the referee determines that a player off the field is or will be able to return within a reasonable length of time.

Law 5 (and elsewhere)

The International Board notes that advantage can be applied “whenever an infringement or offense occurs.” Further, the term “advantage” is applied elsewhere in connection with such events as the entry of another ball or a spectator onto the field. USSF continues to require that advantage be applied only to a violation of Law 12 and to no other type of infringement or offense – in other words, only to fouls and misconduct. Where referees may see the term “advantage” in the Interpretations applied to anything other than a foul or misconduct, it should be understood to mean instead a decision as to whether the offense is doubtful or trifling. In other words, it is not necessary to stop play simply because a spectator enters the field (always an illegal act, of course): the guidance to wait until the spectator actually interferes with play in some way is not based on applying the concept of advantage but on determining that this event, although illegal, has not affected the match and is therefore trifling. When and if the spectator does interfere, the event is no longer trifling and the match must be stopped.

Law 6

The International Board states that, in the case of a penalty kick (presumably including kicks from the mark as well), the AR is to “raise the flag” if the goalkeeper “blatantly moves off the goal line ... and a goal is not scored.” USSF designated in 2008 its own signal for this situation – holding the flag between both hands at waist level parallel to the ground – which is to be used instead of raising the flag.

Law 6

Both last year and again this year, the International Board has created an exception to the general rule that, if advantage is applied to misconduct, the appropriate card must be shown and the proper action taken (e.g., the player sent off) at the next stoppage; otherwise, the opportunity to card has been lost. The Interpretations provide that, if an AR signals for violent conduct but the signal is not seen until after play is restarted after the next stoppage, the referee may still display a red card and send the player off the field. If this should occur, the restart is based on the current stoppage of play rather than on the violent conduct that occurred previously.

USSF advises that:

- this exception is not limited to “violent conduct” in its official sense as a form of misconduct but applies as well to serious foul play (where violence or excessive force is involved) and other acts of misconduct,
- the AR must have signaled for the misconduct at the time it occurred and maintained the signal until it is seen by the referee, and

- if play is stopped solely in response to the signal by the AR, play is restarted with a dropped ball where the ball was when play was stopped (except for the special circumstances involving restarts in the goal area) but otherwise the restart is in accordance with the Law.

Referees are strongly urged to cover this type of situation in their pregame discussion and to make clear what sorts of misconduct are serious enough to warrant maintaining the AR's signal past the next stoppage of play. If a player has received a second yellow card in the same match but was not at that time shown a red card and sent off, the referee remains able to correct the error at any time it is brought to his or her attention by a member of the officiating team.

Law 12

In its guidelines, the International Board has in effect created two scenarios for when the referee stops play for misconduct committed off the field by a player. In the first case, the referee must decide if the player left the field in the normal course of play and, while off the field committed the offense. In this case, after dealing with the misconduct, the referee will restart play with a dropped ball where the ball was when play was stopped (except for the special circumstances involving restarts in the goal area). However, if the referee decides that the player left the field for the purpose of committing the offense and after dealing with the misconduct, play is restarted with an indirect free kick for the opposing team where the ball was when play was stopped (except for the special circumstances involving restarts in the goal area).

In the first case, a dropped ball is the correct restart based on the fact that misconduct was committed off the field. In the second case, an indirect free kick is the correct restart because the player has illegally left the field before committing the restart.

Law 13

If the referee gives an indirect free kick but fails to make the correct signal and the ball directly enters the opposing team's goal from this restart, the referee must order the indirect free kick retaken.

Law 15

Referees should not be confused by the scenario in which, as a result of a throw-in, the ball strikes the ground outside the field before entering the field. If the throw-in has been performed correctly otherwise (e.g., right location, feet on the ground, etc.), the result is a retake of the throw-in by the same team since the ball has not properly been put into play. Only if the throw-in is performed incorrectly in some other way (e.g., wrong location, one or both feet not on or behind the touchline, not facing the field, etc.) would the restart be a throw-in for the opposing team.

Laws 15 and 17

The International Board is advising referees to warn opponents who are about to ignore the minimum distance requirement (Law 15 – two yards from the touchline where the throw-in is occurring; Law 17 – ten yards from the corner arc where the corner kick is being taken) before cautioning a player who persists in failing to respect the minimum distance despite the warning. USSF advises referees that such situations require game management flexibility. Where it is appropriate to warn, this should be done, but where the violation is blatant or where it unfairly affects the team given the restart, the referee should consider an immediate caution for this misconduct.