



To: National Referees
National Instructors
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State Directors of Instruction
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cc: State Directors of Coaching

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Subject: **An Offside Issue – Is Touching the Ball a Requirement?
New York Red Bulls vs FC Dallas (April 15, 2007)**

Date: April 18, 2007

In a match on April 15, 2007, between the New York Red Bulls and FC Dallas (clip attached), Red Bulls player #19 (Richards) shoots on goal. The ball is stopped and deflected by Dallas goalkeeper #1 (Hislop) but it goes to Red Bulls player #11 (van den Bergh) who takes another shot on goal.

When van den Bergh strikes the ball, his teammate, Mathis (#13) is in an offside position – indeed, Mathis is just barely above the goal line on the right hand side of the goal – and the ball is moving directly toward him. Mathis jumps up and the ball passes under him into the net for a score.

The following issues and concerns are raised by this scenario:

- The only action Mathis took was to avoid contact with the ball.
- In so doing, he did not block an opponent's movement or vision or deceive or distract an opponent.
- Mathis did not commit an offside violation because he was not actively involved in play by interfering with play, interfering with an opponent, or gaining an advantage.

On August 24, 2006, USSF issued a memorandum based on the developing interpretation and application of Law 11 which specifically laid out the proposition that “interfering with play” requires either touching the ball or making a credible move to play the ball. Acting to avoid contact (if successful) does not meet either of these criteria. An attacker in an offside position must act (touch the ball, move to the ball, interfere with an opponent, block an opponent, distract or deceive an opponent) to be declared offside. Action to avoid involvement (if successful) must be excluded.

Referees should remember that a scenario such as this one, *which might have been called differently in years past*, must now meet more stringent standards for an offside violation. Although the basic requirements for an offside violation under Law 11 remain the same, our understanding of how to implement these requirements has been evolving to match the modern game.