



U.S. Soccer's Advice to Referees is meant to provide officials of all levels with the proper interpretation and application of the Laws of the Game and create consistent guidelines and procedures for officials to follow in all affiliated competitions.

According to Law 5, the referee "allows play to continue when the team against which an offense has been committed will benefit from such an advantage and penalizes the original offense if the anticipated advantage does not ensue at that time." This language, with no change, has been in the Law since 1997-98. For many years prior to then, Law 5 had simply stated that the referee shall "refrain from penalizing in cases where he is satisfied that, by doing so, he would be giving an advantage to the offending team." The current language recognizes the need to come back to the original offense if the expected advantage does not develop but, in all other respects, these two quotations from Law 5 outline substantially the same concept and reflect the Law as it has existed for many decades.

Not surprisingly commonly referred to as "the advantage clause," this core officiating concept has always been understood to expect the referee to evaluate the consequences of an offense and to avoid stopping play if doing so would be beneficial to the team that committed the infraction. The concept is sometimes also described as not stopping play if that would damage the prospects of the team which suffered the offense. Either way, the critical element is the understanding that committing a violation of the Law does not necessarily require immediately stopping play to administer a punishment.

It is instructive that Law 5 uses the general term "offense" rather than something more specific. While it has always been understood that "offense" includes fouls as defined solely in Law 12, the application of advantage to other offenses found elsewhere in the Laws of the Game has been less clear.

For example, a separate provision in Law 5 recognizes that play need not be stopped immediately for misconduct. Historically, referees have been trained to apply the same advantage concept to misconduct in determining the conditions in which play should be allowed to continue. Despite the similarities, however, the advantage signal would rarely be used in cases solely of misconduct.

Another example may be seen in the fact that all restarts other than the dropped ball are governed by what is ordinarily called "the two-touch rule" which states simply that the player who performs the restart is not permitted to make contact directly with the ball again. There must be some intervening touch or play of the ball by someone (teammate or opponent) before the player who kicked or threw the ball to restart play can touch or play the ball a second time. A violation of this rule calls for an indirect free kick for the opposing team. Because this rule is laid down in Laws other than Law 12, referees have been generally taught in USSF training materials that advantage should not be applied.

As international practice and thinking have evolved over the years, it has become clear that the majority opinion now favors a broader use of advantage to include offenses other than those described in Law 12. It is now considered acceptable for referees (and assistant referees to the extent permitted by Law 6) to apply the advantage *concept* to such other offenses as violations of the two-touch rule where the advantage is clearly evident.



For example, a fullback takes a goal kick and the ball, after leaving the penalty area, is blown backward toward the defender's goal. The fullback kicks the ball in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the ball from entering the goal. The fullback has clearly violated Law 16's two-touch restriction, but advantage should be given and the goal counted. Stopping play for this violation would convert the scoring of a goal to a mere indirect free kick and would obviously be beneficial to the team which committed the offense. In accordance with Law 5, if the ball did not go into the net, the referee should return to the two-touch rule infraction.

Advantage might also be applied to an offside infraction. A13 plays the ball to teammate A21 who was in an offside position at the time. A21 heads the ball toward the opposing team's goal but the shot on goal is saved by the defending goalkeeper who then immediately punts the ball downfield for a successful counter-attack. Advantage should be applied and play allowed to continue without a stoppage. What purpose is served by replacing a long punt downfield toward the opposing team's goal with an indirect free kick at A21's position?

Referees should therefore understand that the "advantage clause" of Law 5 is applicable, at the referee's discretion, to any foul or misconduct and to any other violation of the Law committed by a player during play. Advantage therefore cannot be applied to any restart requirement because these requirements operate prior to the ball going into play. Nothing discussed here should be taken to mean that the definition of advantage itself or the recommended officiating mechanics have changed.

A few words on the proper mechanics of signaling the advantage: the advantage signal need not be given in every situation. When the advantage consists of allowing a goal to be scored, its application is obvious and no signal is needed. Where it is necessary to let players know that the advantage consists of allowing play to continue despite the commission of an offense, then the signal is needed.

USSF training materials, publications, and testing materials will be revised in accordance with this clarification.

The following scenarios are official indications of where advantage should and should not be applied in accordance with this clarification. They cannot cover all situations of potential interest but are sufficiently detailed to provide clear guidance.

Red #4 takes a throw-in and violates Law 15 by having one or both feet completely within the field of play. The ball goes to a Blue player. Advantage is not applied in situations involving a violation of a restart requirement. In this case, the throw-in is given to the opposing team.

The Red team is taking a goal kick but the kicker does not hit the ball squarely so it only travels six feet and stays inside Red's penalty area. The kicker runs to the ball and kicks it again, this time causing it to leave the penalty area but coming directly under the control of a Blue opponent. Advantage is not applied in situations involving a violation of a restart requirement. In this case, the goal kick must be retaken.



Blue #23 performs a goal kick. The ball leaves the penalty area but is blown back toward the Blue goal. The Blue goalkeeper handles the ball but the ball continues into the goal. Advantage should be applied in this situation (the violation is a foul under Law 12 and would be covered under previous guidelines anyway). No advantage signal should be given and the goal should be counted.

Blue #23 performs a goal kick. The ball leaves the penalty area but is blown back toward the Blue goal and Blue #23 attempts to kick the ball away. The ball goes into the net anyway. Advantage should be applied (the violation is not a foul and is described in Law 16 – a 2nd touch offense). The advantage signal should not be given as counting the goal makes the decision clear.

Red #11 takes a free kick and then kicks the ball again but inadvertently delivers it to a Blue opponent who is able to begin a credible attack on the Red goal. Advantage should be applied (the violation is not a foul and is described in Law 13 – a 2nd touch offense) and the advantage signal should be given as it is necessary to make clear that play will not be stopped.

Blue #35 is in an offside position when a teammate passes the ball in her direction. She makes contact with the ball but the ball then goes directly to Red #9 who appears to gain clear control. Red #9 takes a step or two but misplays the ball to a Blue opponent. This situation is governed by the “wait and see” concept and, though advantage is being initially considered, no advantage signal should be given. When it is evident that Red’s control is not maintained, the offside offense should be called.

The referee drops the ball to restart play and Red #18 kicks the ball into his own or the opposing team’s net before the ball touches the ground. Advantage is not applied in situations involving a violation of a restart requirement. In this case, the dropped ball restart must be retaken.

Blue #35 is in an offside position when a teammate passes the ball in her direction. She turns and shoots on goal but the Red goalkeeper takes clear control of the ball and makes a long punt downfield. Advantage is applied but, in the special case of offside, no advantage signal should be given. The “wait and see” concept is used to ensure that the element of control by the opposing team is reliable and demonstrated by the opposing team being able to maintain an active, credible attack on the goal of the team which committed the offside violation. If the evidence of advantage is not convincing and maintained, the offside offense should be called.

During an attack on goal by Blue #46, a Red substitute runs onto the field and tackles the ball away the attacker. However, the ball then goes to Blue #30 who appears able to maintain the attack. In this situation, advantage cannot be applied because the violation has not been committed by a player. Play should be stopped the moment the Red substitute interferes with play and, after dealing with the substitute’s misconduct, play is resumed with an indirect free kick where the ball was when play was stopped (for the illegal entry of the substitute).



Red #2 takes the kick-off for her team after a goal but gives the ball only a glancing strike. It travels forward only a few feet and Red #2 kicks the ball again. It goes to Blue #29 who begins dribbling the ball downfield toward the Red team's goal. Advantage could be applied in this situation (and, if so, the advantage signal would be given) if, in your opinion, Blue #29 is able to maintain a credible attack on goal. If this is not the case, the second touch violation would be called and play restarted with an indirect free kick where the second touch occurred.