

You're glued to the game, and your psychological well-being hinges on your Striker team scoring the winning goal. It's then that you realize that the fate of the game rests in the referee's hands--literally! Since the referee is a critical part of a game of soccer, responsible for keeping order and enforcing the rules, it's crucial for the true soccer fan to be able to decipher what he's seen and what he wants. Here's a crash course on the game.

1. "Listen for the whistle". A referee who blows his whistle has seen something, most often a foul, which requires him to immediately terminate play and deal with the situation. The whistle tone will often indicate the nature of the foul. A short, quick whistle indicates a lesser foul only punished by a free kick, and longer, harder blasts indicate serious fouls punishable by cards or penalty kicks.

2. "Watch for the advantage". A referee who, without blowing his whistle, points both arms out, has seen a foul but has decided to play advantage. In advantage, the referee delays the call because he believes that the fouled team still has the advantage in the situation. Typically the referee will give around 3 seconds to determine who comes out on top. If, at the end of the 3 seconds, an advantage was gained by the fouled team, such as possession being kept or a goal being scored, the foul will be ignored by the referee. If the foul warranted a card, however, he will show the card at the next stoppage in play. Advantage signal:



3. "Watch for direct free kicks". To signal a direct free kick, or DFK, a referee will blow his whistle and point with a raised arm in the direction of the goal that the team who has been awarded the free kick is attacking. A DFK is awarded when one of the players commits one of the ten penal fouls against an opponent. A goal may be scored from a DFK. Direct free kick signal:



4. "Watch for indirect free kicks". If after signaling for a free kick the referee keeps his hand above his head then he is signaling for an indirect free kick, or IFK. An IFK is awarded for any foul not falling under the category of penal foul, or a foul which is not committed against opponents. A goal may not be scored from an IFK until it has touched another player. When signaling for an IFK, the referee will keep his hand up until after the ball has been kicked and touched by another player. Indirect free kick signal:



4. "Watch for the penalty kick". A referee who points directly to the penalty spot, or the spot two-thirds of the way between the penalty area line and goal area line, is indicating that a player has committed a DFK offense within his own penalty area and a penalty kick has been issued. Penalty kick signal (pointing to the penalty spot):



5. "Watch for the yellow card". A referee who shows a player a yellow card is indicating that the player has committed one of the seven cautionable offenses. A player who is issued a yellow card is noted by the referee, and if a second yellow card is issued, the player is sent off. Signal for yellow card (card is in fact yellow):



6. "Watch for the red card". A referee who shows a player the red card is indicating that the player has committed a serious offense, one of the seven "deadly sins" send-off offenses, and must leave the vicinity of the field of play immediately (in professional matches, this most often means he heads to the changeroom). Signal for a red card (the card is in fact red):



7. "Watch for other signals". A referee who points at the goal with his arm pointed straight, parallel to the ground, is signaling for a goal kick. A referee who points at the corner flag with his arm pointed upward is signaling for a corner kick. Signal for a goal kick:



Signal for a corner kick:



Fouls -- what constitutes a foul.

The ten fouls that may be punished by the referee with a direct free kick are:

- **kicking or attempting to kick an opponent
- **tripping or attempting to trip an opponent
- **jumping at an opponent
- **charging an opponent
- **striking or attempting to strike an opponent
- **pushing an opponent
- **tackling an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball
- **holding an opponent
- **spitting at an opponent
- **handling the ball deliberately

The eight offenses for which the referee may award an indirect free kick are:

- **The goalkeeper takes more than six seconds while controlling the ball with his hands before releasing it from his possession
- **The goalkeeper touches the ball again with his hands after it has been released from his possession and has not touched any other player
- **The goalkeeper touches the ball with his hands after it has been deliberately kicked to him by a team-mate
- **The goalkeeper touches the ball with his hands after he has received it directly from a throw-in taken by a team-mate
- **Playing in a dangerous manner
- **Impeding the progress of an opponent
- **Preventing the goalkeeper from releasing the ball from his hands
- **Any other offense is committed for which play is stopped to caution or send-off a player

The referee will caution and show the yellow card to a player who:

- **is guilty of unsporting behaviour
- **shows dissent by word or action
- **persistently infringes the Laws of the Game
- **delays the restart of play
- **fails to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a corner kick or free kick
- **enters or re-enters the field of play without the referee's permission
- **deliberately leaves the field of play without the referee's permission

The referee will send-off and show the red card to a player who:

- **is guilty of serious foul play
- **is guilty of violent conduct
- **spits at an opponent or any other person
- **denies the opposing team a goal or an obvious goalscoring opportunity by deliberately handling the ball (this does not apply to a goalkeeper within his own penalty area)
- **denies an obvious goalscoring opportunity to an opponent moving towards the player's goal by an offense punishable by a free kick or a penalty kick
- **uses offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or gestures
- **receives a second caution in the same match