

## **AN EXPLANATION OF OFFSIDE – LAW 11 DEVELOPED PRIMARILY FOR PLAYERS**

First off, understand that every rule in soccer relates to the “SEE” concept. That is to say, each rule and its enforcement must promote the *safety* of players, allow for *equality* in play and promote *enjoyment* for players and spectators.

Some aspects of the offside rule have been around since the 1860's. At that time a player was considered to be a “sneaker” if he attempted to move off from his side and park in close proximity to the opponent's goal awaiting a long pass for an easy score. Rules from 1860 cite that a player is “out of play” immediately if he is in front of the ball. Here is the concept of equality and enjoyment coming into play way back when the game was in its early stages.

Admittedly the "Offside Rule" in soccer is perhaps the most confusing of the "17 Rules of Soccer" to understand, both for players and fans.

Today quite simply:

- 1) There are 2 parts of offside: position and involvement.
- 2) An attacking player is in an offside position, by being closer to the opponent's goal than the ball, if the player is in the attacking half of the field and there are less than two defenders between or even with him/her and the goal at the

moment/time the ball is played to or toward them.

- 3) To then be called offside they must be involved in the play.
- 4) Involved with play if, at the moment the ball is touched or is played by one of his team, he is, in the opinion of the referee, actively involved in the play by:
  - Interfering with play
  - Interfering with an opponent
  - Gaining an advantage by being in that position.
- 5) If a player is in an offside position, but not involved in the play, it is not an offside offense.
- 6) By definition in the Laws, a player is not offside
  - a. In their own half of the field
  - b. They receive the ball *directly* from a
    - i. Throw-in; corner kick; goal kick

Offside is determined by the player's position *at the moment* the ball is played to/toward him not when the player receives it. This leads to confusion when the player seems to be offside on receipt of the ball but was actually onside as the ball was initially played. This is why the offside call is typically the main job of the Assistant Referee, who is to be in-line with the second to last defender to make the judgment call correctly.

Concerning the concept of involvement, here is a brief description of each involvement point.

1) Interfering with play means in the simplest form playing or attempting to play the ball. Today this concept often involves a “wait and see” position when two or more attacking players are involved and one or more were onside as the ball was played. The AR must wait to see who actually plays the ball first, the player in the offside position or a teammate from onside.

2) Interfering with an opponent relates to the attacker’s actions that prevent an opponent from playing the ball or actively challenging the opponent for the ball. This might be obstructing the opponent’s line of sight, keeping an opponent from moving toward the ball or causing an opponent to be deceived or distracted away from the ball or play.

3) Gaining an advantage refers to gaining an unfair advantage from being in an offside position. There are very straightforward examples such as the ball rebounding from a goal post, cross bar or opponent (typically the goalkeeper) directly to an attacker in an offside position. If the attacker plays the ball they are considered to be offside and the infraction called. The change or in FIFA’s terms, clarification, to this came about in 2013 when language was modified to state:

“ A player in an offside position receiving the ball from an opponent who *deliberately* plays the ball is

not considered to be offside and no call is made.”

Further wording states that a deliberate save such as, the goalkeeper blocking the ball away is not considered here and the attacker is still offside. This does require referees to make a distinction between a play of the ball versus a deflection or rebound. For example, a defender jumping to try and head the ball away is clearly a deliberate play of the ball, taking time to position the body so as to make a play on the ball is not just a deflection but an intentional play. A ball in flight just hitting the leg of a defender who has not moved to make a play on the ball is a true deflection and offside still stands. As a reference, think about the “hand ball” here. A handball is a deliberate play on the ball by the hand/arm, not just the ball striking the hand. The player must have moved the hand/arm to make contact with the ball for a handball foul to be called.

Hopefully, this brief overview of offside has been helpful. If you have questions, there are local referee instructors who will be glad to answer them or hold a short offside clinic.

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