

# Practical guidelines for match officials

# Introduction

These guidelines contain practical advice for match officials which supplements the information in the Laws of the Game section.

Reference is made in Law 5 to referees operating within the framework of the Laws of the Game and the 'spirit of the game'. Referees are expected to use common sense and to apply the 'spirit of the game' when applying the Laws of the Game, especially when making decisions relating to whether a match takes place and/or continues.

This is especially true for the lower levels of football where it may not always be possible for the Law to be strictly applied. For example, unless there are safety issues, the referee should allow a game to start/continue if:

- one or more corner flags are missing
- there is a minor inaccuracy with the markings on the field of play such as the corner area, centre circle etc.
- the goalposts/crossbar are not white

In such cases, the referee should, with the agreement of the teams, play/continue the match and must submit a report to the appropriate authorities.

Key:

- AR = assistant referee
- AAR = additional assistant referee

# Positioning, movement and teamwork

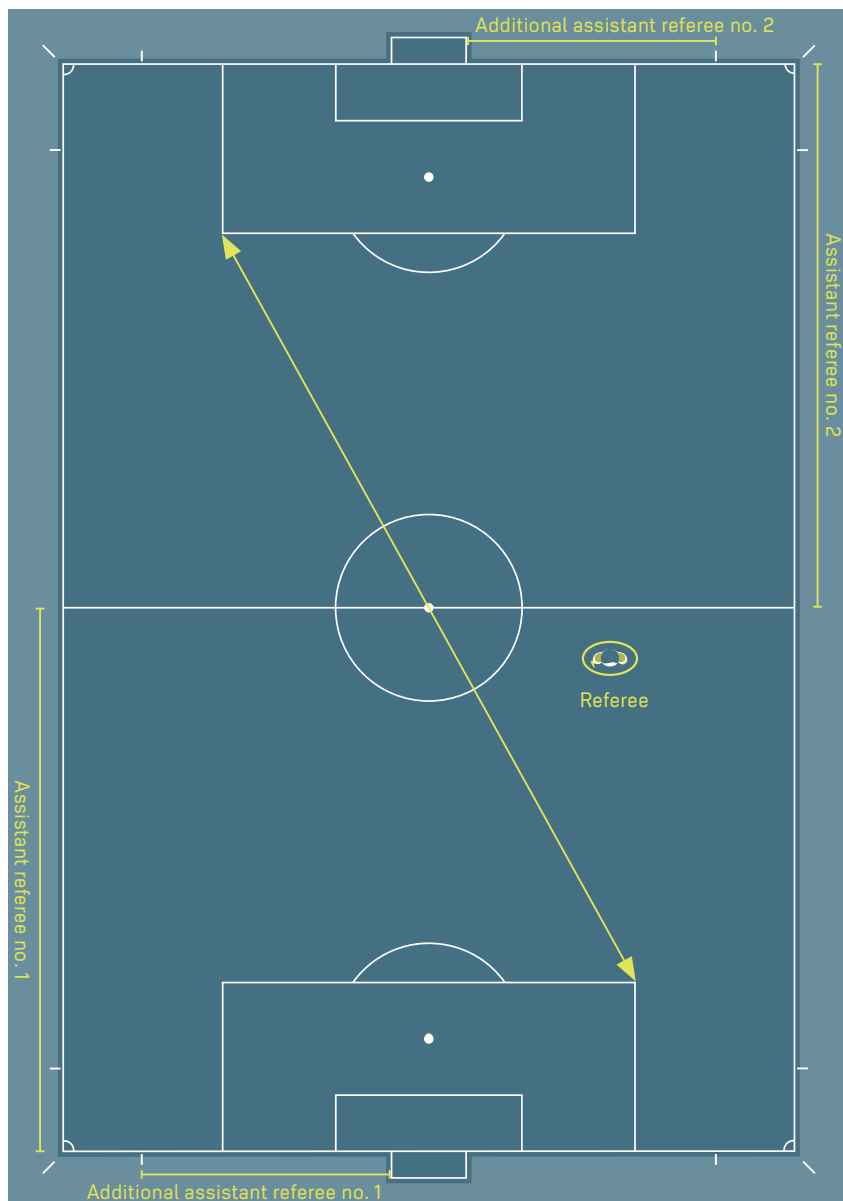
## 1. General positioning and movement

The best position is one from which the referee can make the correct decision. All recommendations about positioning must be adjusted using specific information about the teams, the players and events in the match.

The positions recommended in the graphics are basic guidelines. The recommended positions are areas within which the referee is likely to be most effective. These areas may be larger, smaller or differently shaped depending on the exact match circumstances.

### **Recommendations:**

- The play should be between the referee and the lead AR
- The lead AR should be in the referee's field of vision so the referee should usually use a wide diagonal system
- Staying towards the outside of the play makes it easier to keep play and the lead AR in the referee's field of vision
- The referee should be close enough to see play without interfering with play
- 'What needs to be seen' is not always in the vicinity of the ball. The referee should also pay attention to:
  - player confrontations off the ball
  - possible offences in the area towards which play is moving
  - offences occurring after the ball is played away





**Positioning of assistant referees and additional assistant referees**

The AR must be in line with the second-last defender or the ball if it is nearer to the goal line than the second-last defender. The AR must always face the field of play, even when running. Side-to-side movement should be used for short distances. This is especially important when judging offside as it gives the AR a better line of vision.

The AAR position is behind the goal line except where it is necessary to move onto the goal line to judge a goal/no goal situation. The AAR is not allowed to enter the field of play unless there are exceptional circumstances.



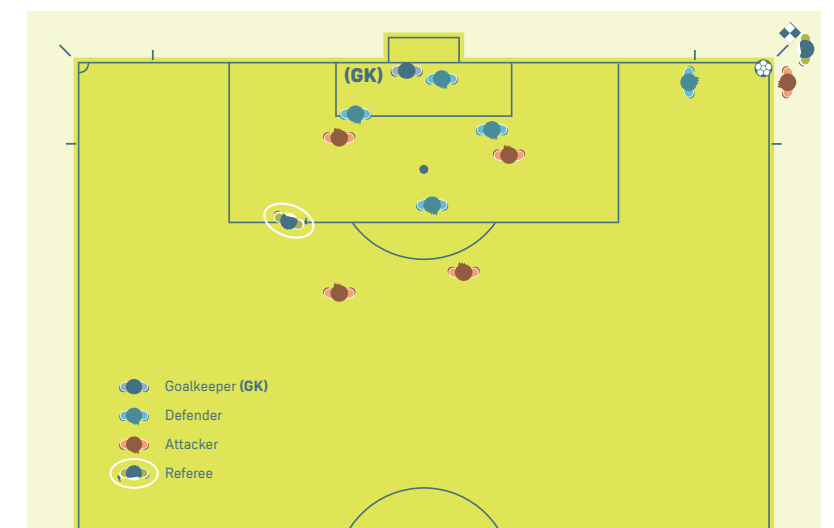
## 2. Positioning and teamwork

### Consultation

When dealing with disciplinary issues, eye contact and a basic discreet hand signal from the AR to the referee may be sufficient. When direct consultation is required, the AR may advance 2–3 metres onto the field of play if necessary. When talking, the referee and AR should both face the field of play to avoid being heard by others and to observe the players and field of play.

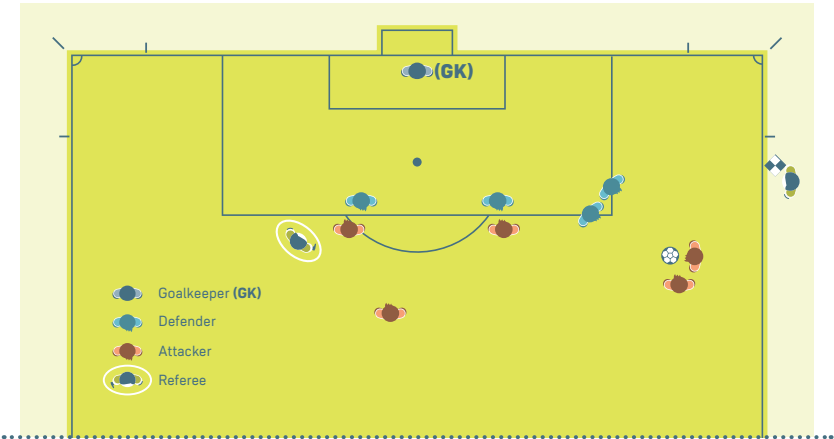
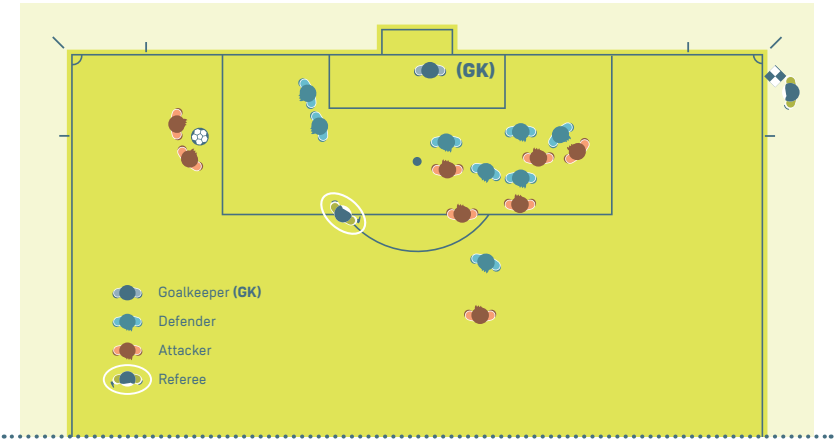
### Corner kick

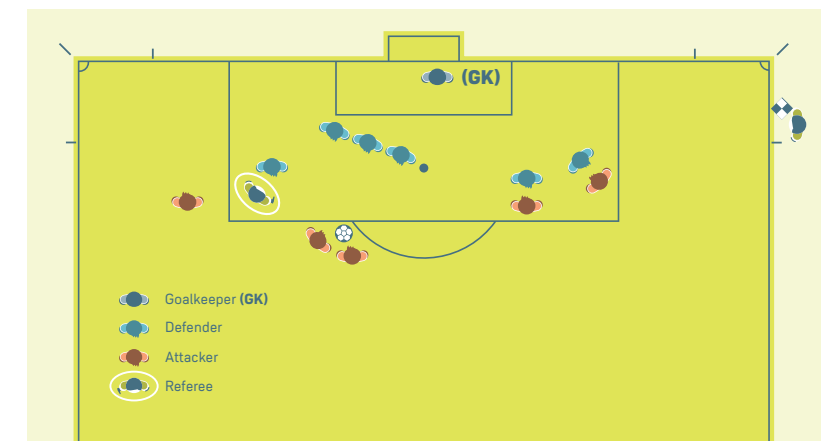
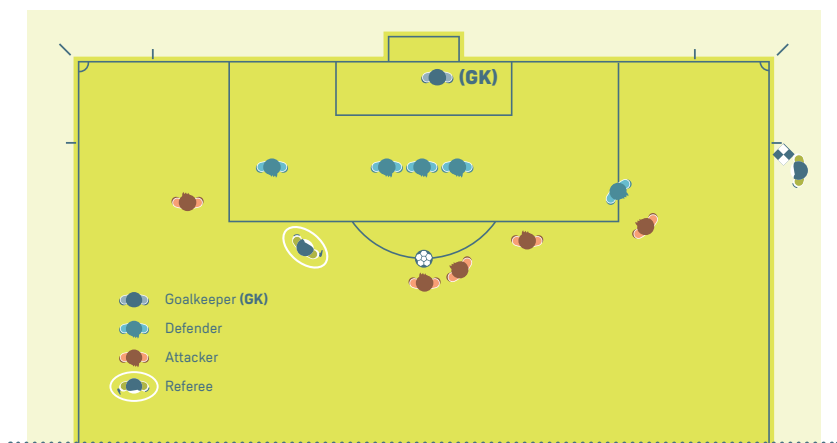
The AR's position for a corner kick is behind the corner flag in line with the goal line but the AR must not interfere with the player taking the corner kick and must check that the ball is properly placed in the corner area.



**Free kick**

The AR's position for a free kick must be in line with the second-last defender to check the offside line. However, the AR must be ready to follow the ball by moving down the touchline towards the corner flag if there is a direct shot on goal.



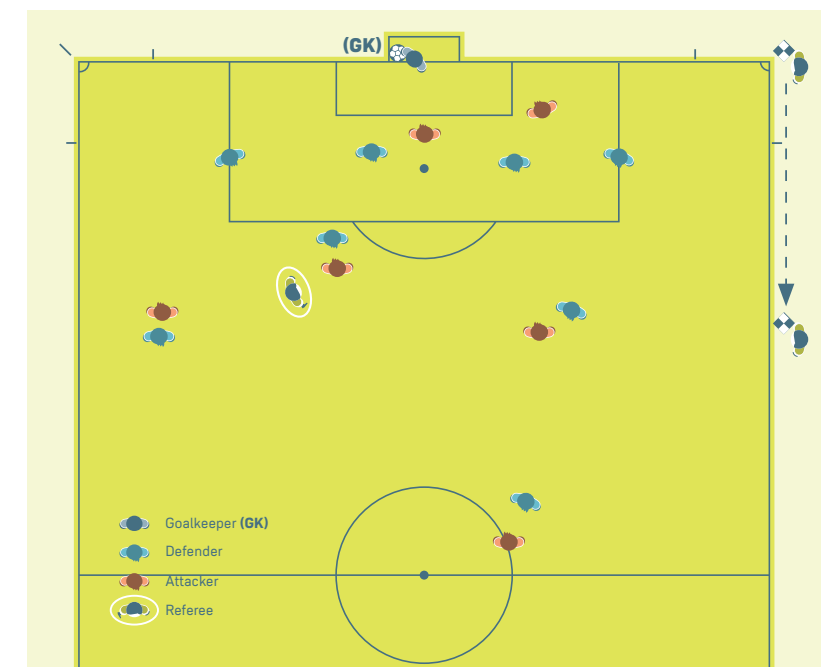


### Goal/no goal

When a goal has been scored and there is no doubt about the decision, the referee and assistant referee must make eye contact and the assistant referee must then move quickly 25–30 metres along the touchline towards the halfway line without raising the flag.

When a goal has been scored but the ball appears still to be in play, the assistant referee must first raise the flag to attract the referee's attention then continue with the normal goal procedure of running quickly 25–30 metres along the touchline towards the halfway line.

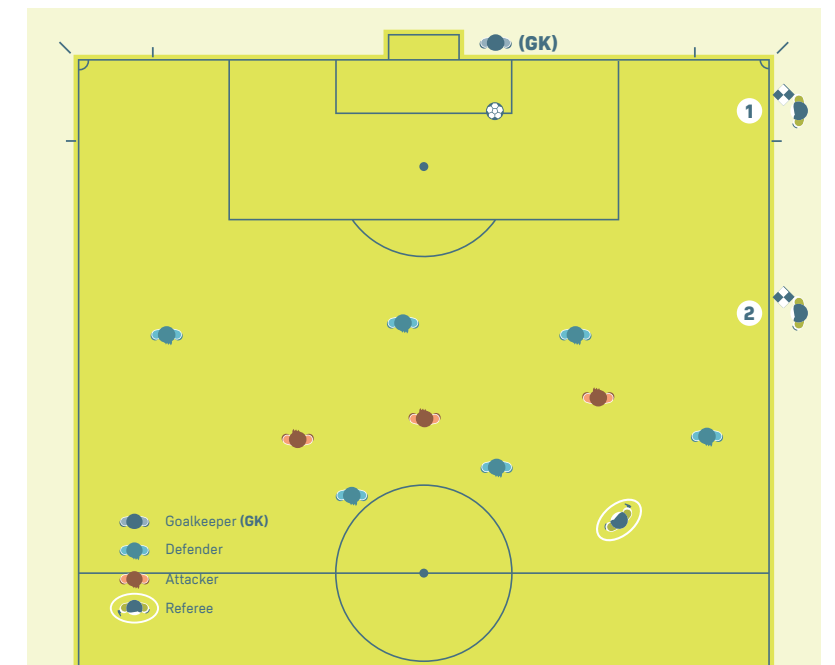
On occasions when the whole of the ball does not cross the goal line and play continues as normal because a goal has not been scored, the referee must make eye contact with the assistant referee and if necessary give a discreet hand signal.



## Goal kick

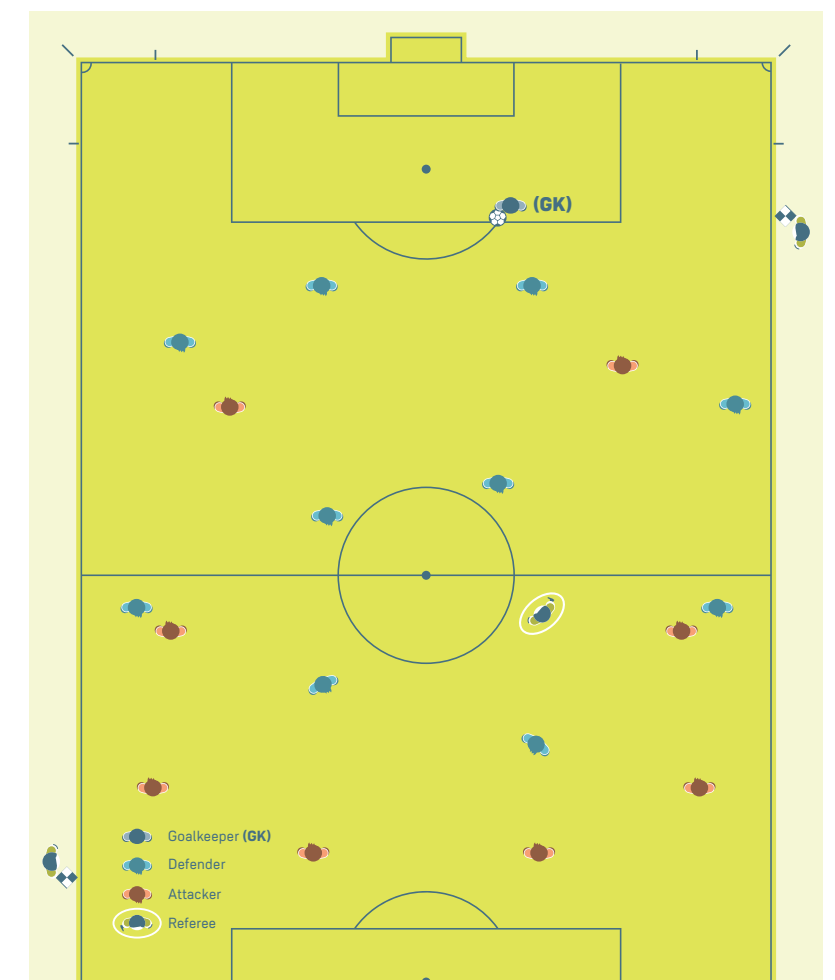
The AR must first check if the ball is inside the goal area. If the ball is not placed correctly, the AR must not move from the position and must make eye contact with the referee and raise the flag. Once the ball is placed correctly inside the goal area, the AR must take a position to check the offside line.

However, if there is an AAR, the AR should take up a position in line with the offside line and the AAR must be positioned at the intersection of the goal line and the goal area, and check if the ball is placed inside the goal area. If the ball is not placed correctly, the AAR must communicate this to the referee.



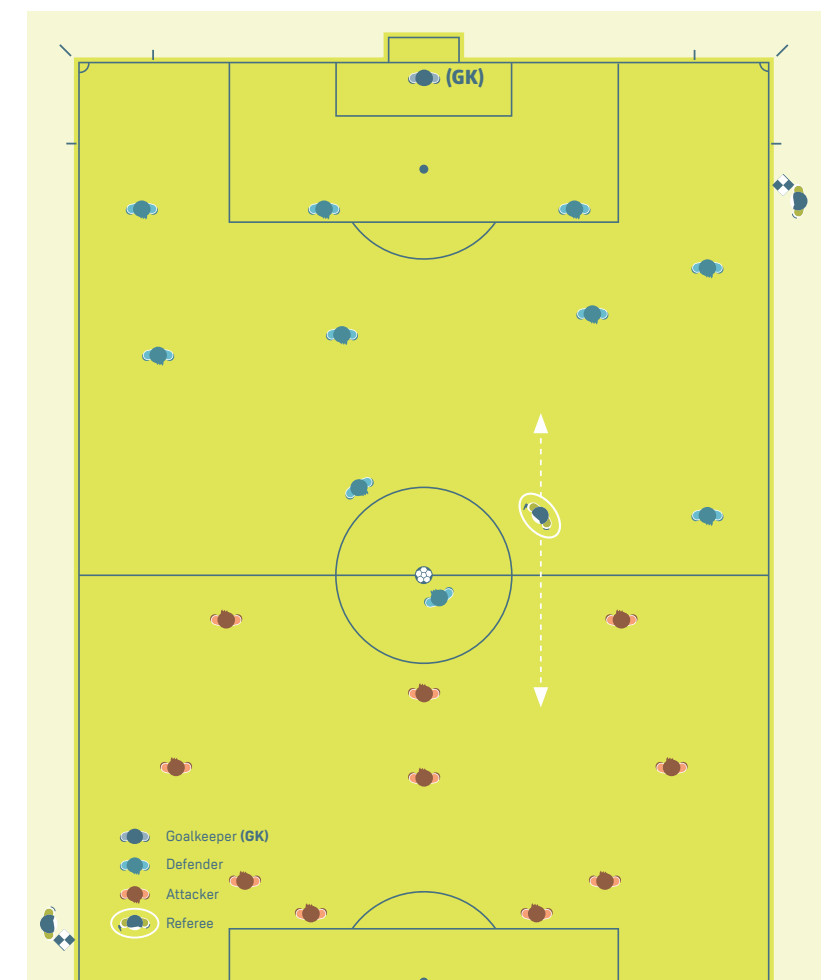
### Goalkeeper releasing the ball

The AR must take a position in line with the edge of the penalty area and check that the goalkeeper does not handle the ball outside the penalty area. Once the goalkeeper has released the ball, the AR must take a position to check the offside line.



## Kick-off

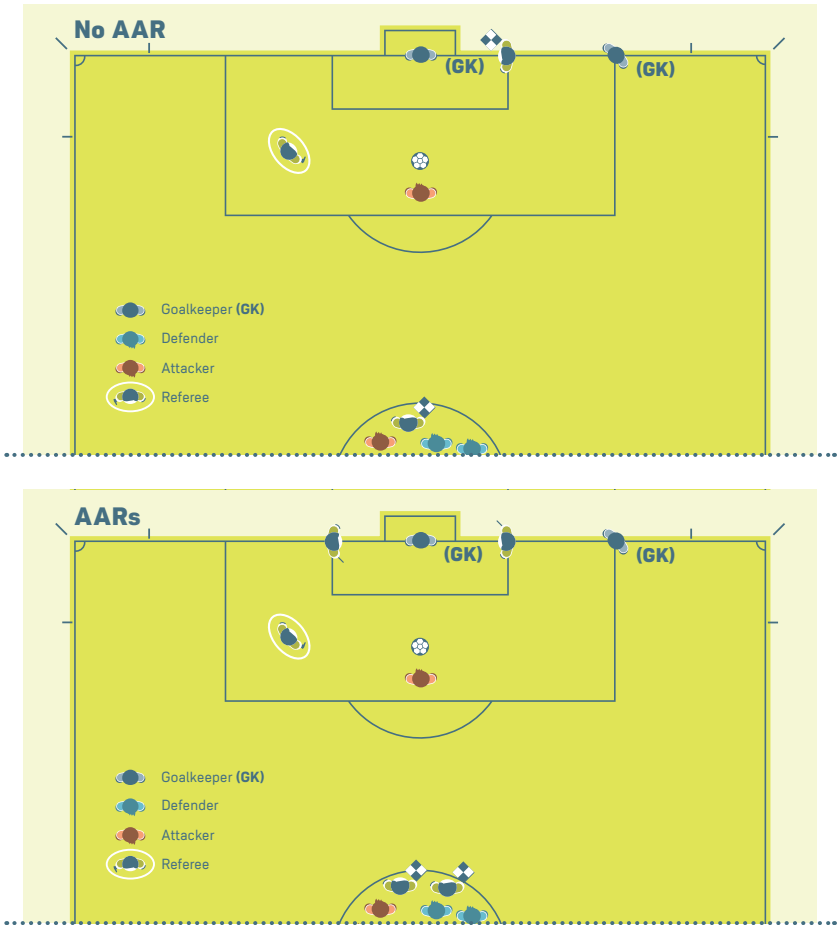
The ARs must be in line with the second-last defender.





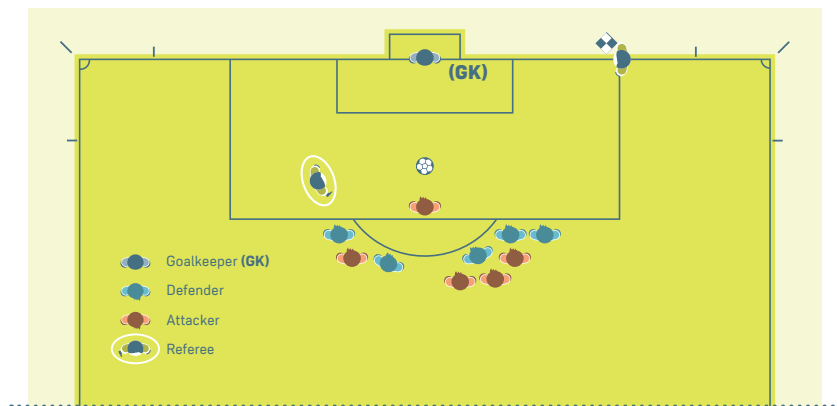
**Penalties (penalty shoot-out)**

One AR must be positioned at the intersection of the goal line and the goal area. The other AR must be situated in the centre circle to control the players. If there are AARs, they must be positioned at each intersection of the goal line and the goal area, to the right and left of the goal respectively, except where GLT is in use when only one AAR is required. In this case, AAR2 and AR1 should monitor the players in the centre circle and AR2 and the fourth official should monitor the technical areas.

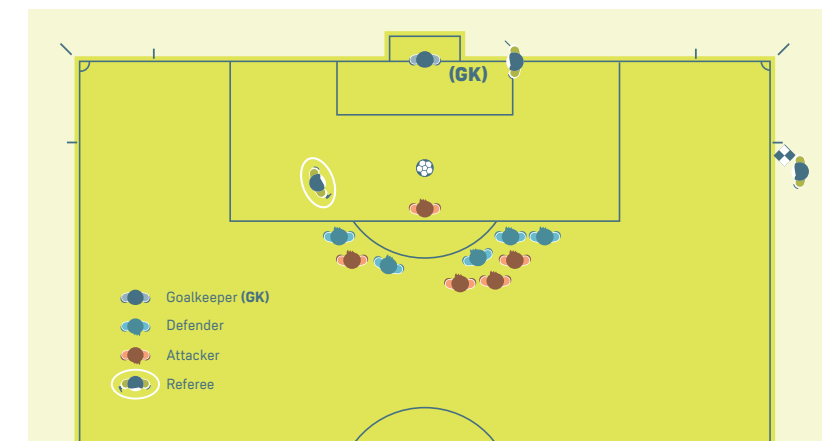


## Penalty kick

The AR must be positioned at the intersection of the goal line and the penalty area.



Where there are AARs, the AAR must be positioned at the intersection of the goal line and the goal area and the AR is positioned in line with the penalty mark (which is the offside line).



**Mass confrontation**

In situations of mass confrontation, the nearest AR may enter the field of play to assist the referee. The other AR must observe and record details of the incident. The fourth official should remain in the vicinity of the technical areas.

**Required distance**

When a free kick is awarded very close to the AR, the AR may enter the field of play (usually at the request of the referee) to help ensure that the players are positioned 9.15 m (10 yds) from the ball. In this case, the referee must wait until the AR is back in position before restarting play.

**Substitution**

If there is no fourth official, the AR moves to the halfway line to assist with the substitution procedure; the referee must wait until the AR is back in position before restarting play.

If there is a fourth official, the AR does not need to move to the halfway line as the fourth official carries out the substitution procedure unless there are several substitutions at the same time, in which case the AR moves to the halfway line to assist the fourth official.



# Body language, communication and whistle

## 1. Referees

### Body language

Body language is a tool that the referee uses to:

- help control the match
- show authority and self-control

Body language is not an explanation of a decision.

### Signals

See Law 5 for diagrams of signals

### Whistle

The whistle is needed to:

- start play (first and second half of normal play and extra time), after a goal
- stop play:
  - for a free kick or penalty kick
  - if the match is suspended or abandoned
  - at the end of each half
- restart play for:
  - free kicks when the appropriate distance is required
  - penalty kicks
- restart play after it has been stopped for a:
  - caution or sending-off

- injury
- substitution

The whistle is NOT needed to:

- stop play for a clear:
  - goal kick, corner kick, throw-in or goal
- restart play from:
  - most free kicks, and a goal kick, corner kick, throw-in or dropped ball

A whistle which is used too frequently/unnecessarily will have less impact when it is needed.

If the referee wants the player(s) to wait for the whistle before restarting play (e.g. when ensuring that defending players are 9.15m (10 yd) from the ball at a free kick) the referee must clearly inform the attacking player(s) to wait for the whistle.

If the referee blows the whistle in error and play stops, play is restarted with a dropped ball.

## **2. Assistant referees**

### **Beep signal**

The beep signal system is an additional signal which is only used to gain the referee's attention. Situations when the signal beep may be useful include:

- offside
- offences (outside the view of the referee)
- throw-in, corner kick, goal kick or goal (tight decisions)

### **Electronic communication system**

Where an electronic communication system is used, the referee will advise the ARs as to when it may be appropriate to use the communication system with, or instead of, a physical signal.

### **Flag technique**

The AR's flag must always be unfurled and visible to the referee. This usually means the flag is carried in the hand closest to the referee. When making a signal, the AR stops running, faces the field of play, makes eye contact with the referee and raises the flag with a deliberate (not hasty or exaggerated) motion. The flag should be like an extension of the arm. The ARs must raise the flag using the hand that will be used for the next signal. If circumstances change and the other hand must be used, the AR should move the flag to the opposite hand below the waist. If the AR signals that the ball is out of play, the signal must be maintained until the referee acknowledges it.

If the AR signals for a sending-off offence and the signal is not seen immediately:

- if play has been stopped, the restart may be changed in accordance with the Laws (free kick, penalty kick, etc.)
- if play has restarted, the referee may still take disciplinary action but not penalise the offence with a free kick or penalty kick

### **Gestures**

As a general rule, the AR should not use obvious hand signals. However, in some instances, a discreet hand signal may assist the referee. The hand signal should have a clear meaning which should have been agreed in the pre-match discussion.

### **Signals**

See Law 6 for diagrams of signals

#### **Corner kick/goal kick**

When the ball wholly passes over the goal line, the AR raises the flag with the right hand (better line of vision) to inform the referee that the ball is out of play and then if it is:

- near to the AR – indicate whether it is a goal kick or a corner kick
- far from the AR – make eye contact and follow the referee's decision

When the ball clearly passes over the goal line, the AR does not need to raise the flag to indicate that the ball has left the field of play. If the goal kick or

corner kick decision is obvious, it is not necessary to give a signal, especially when the referee gives a signal.

## **Fouls**

The AR must raise the flag when a foul or misconduct is committed in the immediate vicinity or out of the referee's vision. In all other situations, the AR must wait and offer an opinion if it is required and then inform the referee of what was seen and heard, and which players were involved.

Before signalling for an offence, the AR must determine that:

- the offence was out of the referee's view or the referee's view was obstructed
- the referee would not have applied the advantage

When an offence occurs which requires a signal from the AR, the AR must:

- raise the flag with the same hand that will also be used for the remainder of the signal – this gives the referee a clear indication as to who will be awarded the free kick
- make eye contact with the referee
- give the flag a slight wave back and forth (avoiding any excessive or aggressive movement)

The AR must use the 'wait and see technique' to allow play to continue and not raise the flag when the team against which an offence has been committed will benefit from the advantage; it is therefore very important for the AR to make eye contact with the referee.

## **Fouls inside the penalty area**

When a foul is committed by a defender inside the penalty area out of the vision of the referee, especially if near to the AR's position, the AR must first make eye contact with the referee to see where the referee is positioned and what action has been taken. If the referee has not taken any action, the AR must signal with the flag, use the electronic beep signal and then visibly move down the touchline towards the corner flag.



### **Fouls outside the penalty area**

When a foul is committed by a defender outside the penalty area (near the boundary of the penalty area), the AR should make eye contact with the referee, to see the referee's position and what action has been taken, and signal with the flag if necessary. In counter-attack situations, the AR should be able to give information such as whether or not a foul has been committed and whether a foul was committed inside or outside the penalty area, and what disciplinary action should be taken. The AR should make a clear movement along the touchline towards the halfway line to indicate when the offence took place outside the penalty area.

### **Goal – no goal**

When it is clear that the ball has wholly passed over the goal line in the goal, the AR must make eye contact with the referee without giving any additional signal.

When a goal has been scored but it is not clear whether the ball has passed over the line, the AR must first raise the flag to attract the referee's attention and then confirm the goal.

### **Offside**

The first action of the AR for an offside decision is to raise the flag (using the right hand, giving the AR a better line of vision) and then, if the referee stops play, use the flag to indicate the area of the field of play in which the offence occurred. If the flag is not immediately seen by the referee, the AR must maintain the signal until it has been acknowledged or the ball is clearly in the control of the defending team.

### **Penalty kick**

If the goalkeeper blatantly moves off the goal line before the ball is kicked and prevents a goal from being scored, the AR should indicate the encroachment according to the pre-match instructions from the referee.

### **Substitution**

Once the AR has been informed (by the fourth official or team official) that a substitution is requested, the AR must signal this to the referee at the next stoppage.

## **Throw-in**

When the ball wholly passes over the touchline:

- near to the AR – a direct signal should be made to indicate the direction of the throw-in
- far from the AR and the throw-in decision is an obvious one – the AR must make a direct signal to indicate the direction of the throw-in
- far from the AR and the AR is in doubt about the direction of the throw-in – the AR must raise the flag to inform the referee that the ball is out of play, make eye contact with the referee and follow the referee's signal

## **3. Additional assistant referees**

The AARs use a radio communication system (not flags) to communicate with the referee. If the radio communication system fails to work, the AARs will use an electronic signal beep flagstick. AARs do not usually use obvious hand signals but, in some instances, a discreet hand signal may give valuable support to the referee. The hand signal should have a clear meaning and such signals should be agreed in the pre-match discussion.

The AAR, having assessed that the ball has wholly passed over the goal line within the goal, must:

- immediately inform the referee via the communication system that a goal should be awarded
- make a clear signal with the left arm perpendicular to the goal line pointing towards the centre of the field (flagstick in the left hand is also required). This signal is not required when the ball has very clearly passed over the goal line

The referee will make the final decision.

# Other advice

## 1. Advantage

The referee may play advantage whenever an offence occurs but should consider the following in deciding whether to apply the advantage or stop play:

- the severity of the offence – if the offence warrants a sending-off, the referee must stop play and send off the player unless there is a clear opportunity to score a goal
- the position where the offence was committed – the closer to the opponent's goal, the more effective the advantage can be
- the chances of an immediate, promising attack
- the atmosphere of the match

## 2. Allowance for time lost

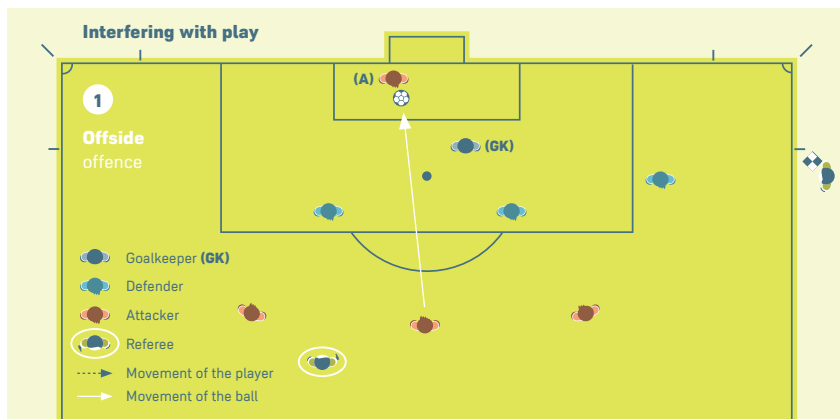
Many stoppages in play are entirely natural (e.g. throw-ins, goal kicks). An allowance is made only when delays are excessive.

## 3. Holding an opponent

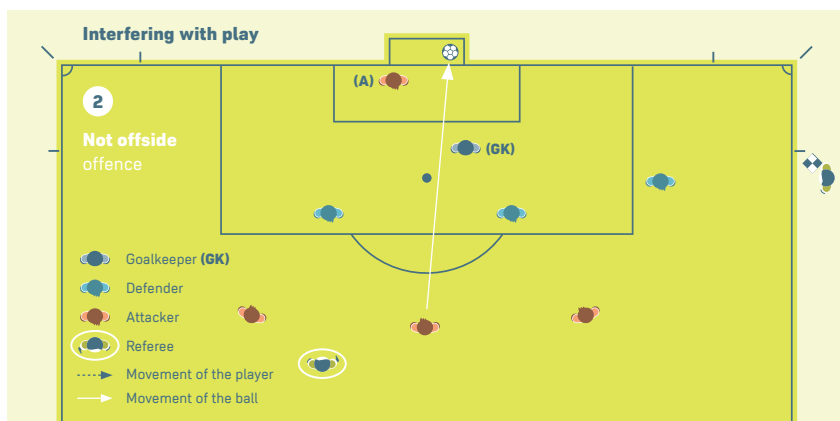
Referees are reminded to make an early intervention and to deal firmly with holding offences, especially inside the penalty area at corner kicks and free kicks. To deal with these situations:

- the referee must warn any player holding an opponent before the ball is in play
- caution the player if the holding continues before the ball is in play
- award a direct free kick or penalty kick and caution the player if it happens once the ball is in play

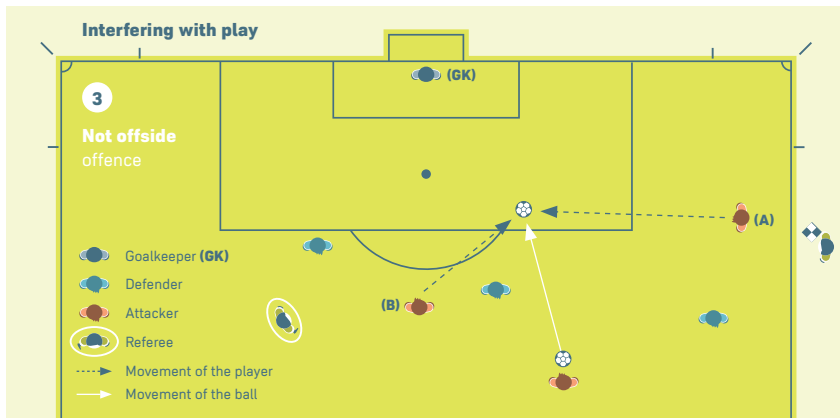
## 4. Offside



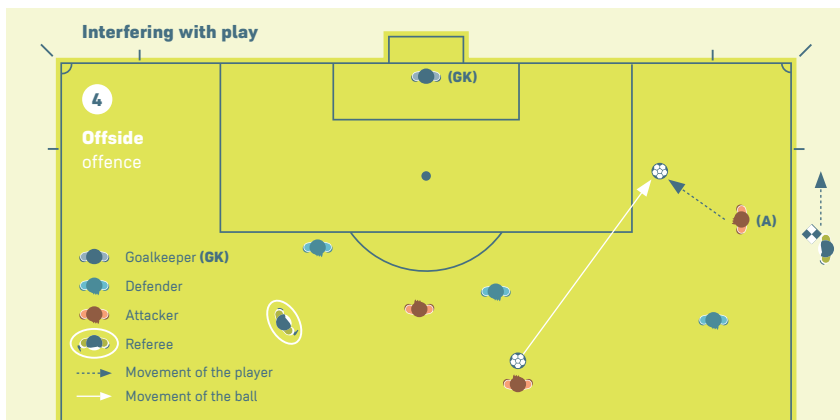
An attacker **in an offside position** (A), not interfering with an opponent, **touches the ball**. The assistant referee must raise the flag when the player **touches the ball**.



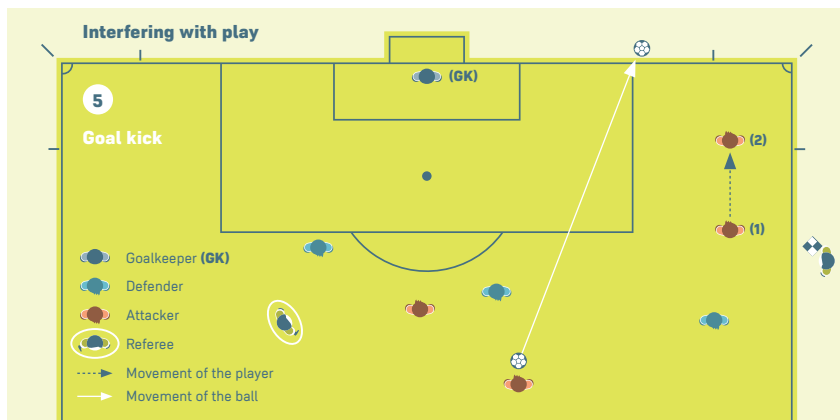
An attacker **in an offside position** (A), not interfering with an opponent, **does not touch the ball**. The player did not touch the ball, so cannot be penalised.



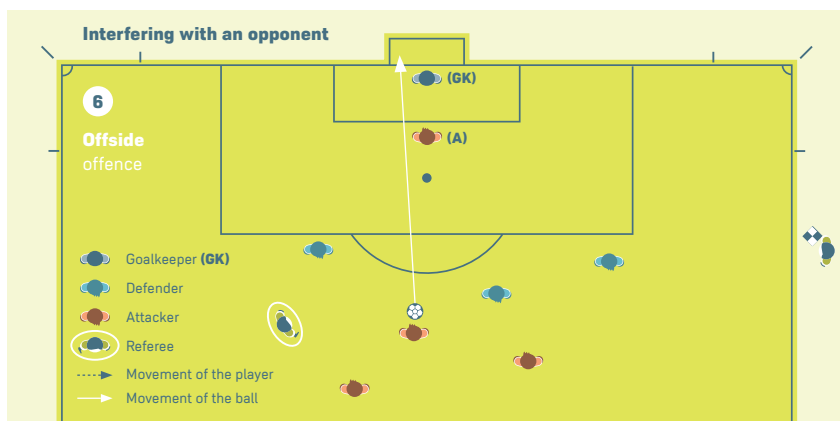
An attacker **in an offside position** (A) runs towards the ball and a team-mate **in an onside position** (B) also runs towards the ball and plays it. (A) did not touch the ball, so cannot be penalised.



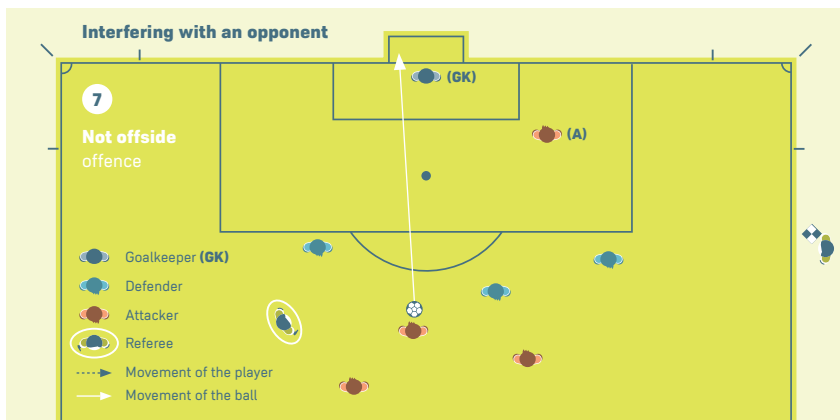
A player **in an offside position** (A) may be penalised before playing or touching the ball, if, in the opinion of the referee, no other team-mate in an onside position has the opportunity to play the ball.



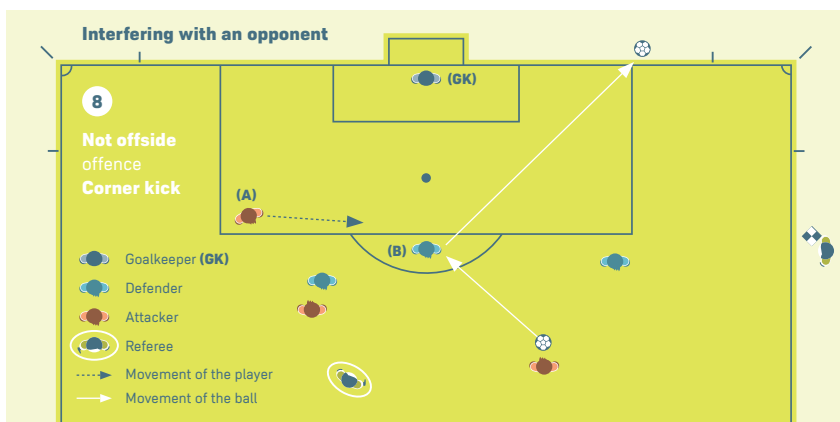
An attacker **in an offside position** (1) runs towards the ball and **does not touch** the ball. The assistant referee must signal **'goal kick'**.



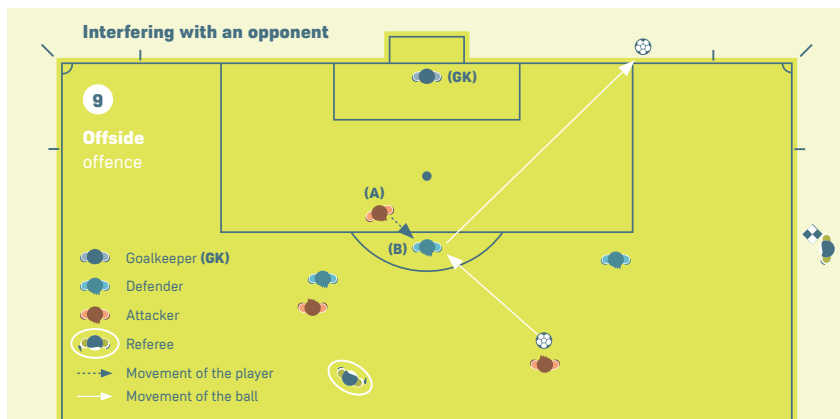
An attacker **in an offside position** (A) is clearly obstructing the goalkeeper's line of vision. The player must be penalised for preventing an opponent from playing or being able to play the ball.



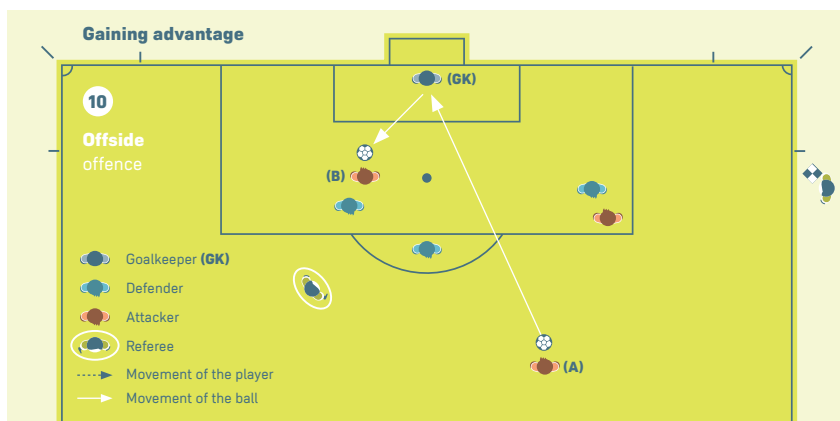
An attacker **in an offside position** (A) is **not** clearly obstructing the goalkeeper's line of vision or challenging an opponent for the ball.



An attacker **in an offside position** (A) runs towards the ball but does not prevent the opponent from playing or being able to play the ball.  
(A) is **not** challenging an opponent (B) for the ball.

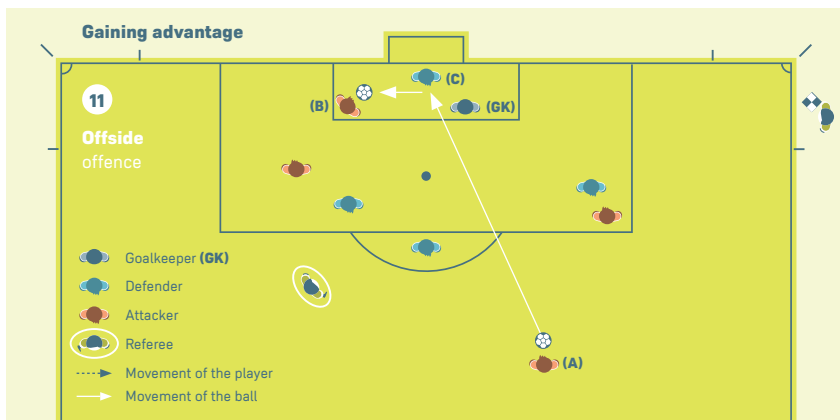


An attacker **in an offside position** (A) runs towards the ball, preventing the opponent (B) from playing or being able to play the ball by challenging the opponent for the ball. (A) is challenging an opponent (B) for the ball.

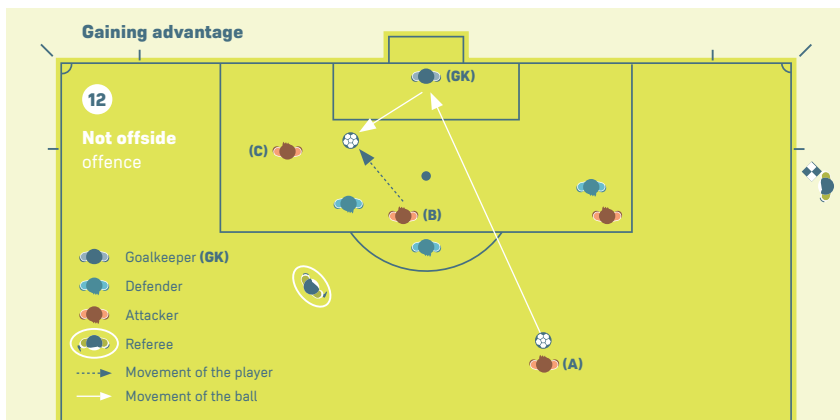


An attacker **in an offside position** (B) is penalised for **playing or touching the ball** that rebounds, is deflected or is played from a deliberate save by the goalkeeper, having been **in an offside position** when the ball was last touched or is played by a team-mate.

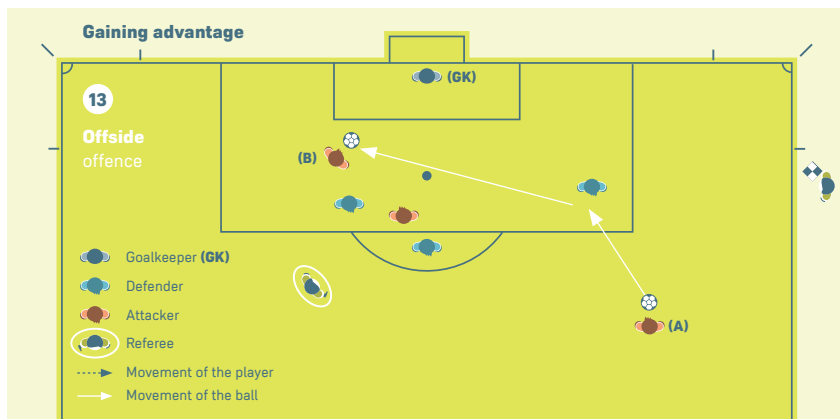




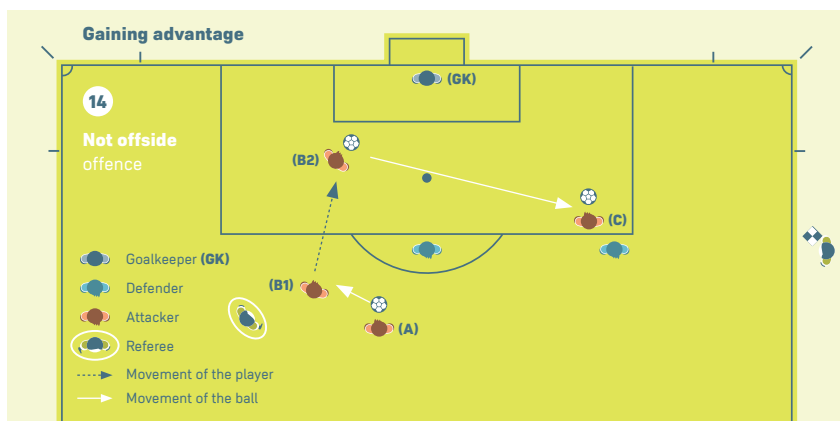
An attacker **in an offside position** (B) is penalised for **playing or touching the ball** that rebounds or is deflected from a deliberate save by a player from the defending team (C), having been **in an offside position** when the ball was last touched or is played by a team-mate.



The shot by a team-mate (A) rebounds from the goalkeeper, (B) is in an onside position and plays the ball, (C) **in an offside position** is not penalised because the player did not gain an advantage from being in that position because the player did not touch the ball.



The shot by a team-mate (A) rebounds off or is deflected by an opponent to attacker (B), who is penalised for **playing or touching the ball** having previously been **in an offside position**.



An attacker (C) is **in an offside position**, not interfering with an opponent, when a team-mate (A) passes the ball to player (B1) in an onside position who runs towards the opponents' goal and passes the ball (B2) to team-mate (C). Attacker (C) was **in an onside position** when the ball was passed, so cannot be penalised.

## **5. Injuries**

The safety of the players is of paramount importance and the referee should facilitate the work of the medical personnel, especially in the case of a serious injury and/or an assessment of a head injury. This will include respecting and assisting with agreed assessment/treatment protocols.

## **6. Treatment/assessment after a caution/sending-off**

Previously, an injured player who received medical attention on the field of play had to leave before the restart. This can be unfair if an opponent caused the injury as the offending team has a numerical advantage when play restarts.

However, this requirement was introduced because players often unsportingly used an injury to delay the restart for tactical reasons.

As a balance between these two unfair situations, The IFAB has decided that only for a physical offence where the opponent is cautioned or sent off, an injured player can be quickly assessed/treated and then remain on the field of play.

In principle, the delay should not be any longer than currently occurs when a medical person(s) comes onto the field to assess an injury. The difference is that the point at which the referee used to require the medical person(s) and the player to leave is now the point at which the medical staff leave but the player can remain.

To ensure the injured player does not use/extend the delay unfairly, referees are advised to:

- be aware of the match situation and any potential tactical reason to delay the restart
- inform the injured player that if medical treatment is required it must be quick
- signal for the medical person(s) (not the stretchers) and, if possible, remind them to be quick

When the referee decides play should restart, either:

- the medical person(s) leaves and the player remains or
- the player leaves for further assessment/treatment (stretcher signal may be necessary)

As a general guide, the restart should not be delayed for more than about 20–25 seconds beyond the point when everyone was ready for play to restart, except in the case of a serious injury and/or an assessment of a head injury.

The referee must make full allowance for the stoppage.

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