



To: State Referee Administrators
State Directors of Instruction
State Directors of Assessment
Chair, State Referee Committee
National Referees, Assessors and Instructors
State Directors of Coaching

From: Alfred Kleinaitis
Manager of Referee Education and Development

Re: Control of the Ball by the Goalkeeper

Date: December 19, 2005

Attached are two clips which illustrate the necessity of understanding and applying correctly the Law regarding when a goalkeeper has a ball in control and thus when a ball may or may not be played. It is well established that a ball which is controlled by the goalkeeper cannot be legally played by an opponent. Less clear, perhaps, is when goalkeepers relinquish that control by releasing the ball into play.

The first clip is from an English professional match. The goalkeeper has the ball in his hands and then, apparently not realizing that an opponent remains behind him, sets the ball on the ground with the obvious intent of playing it to a teammate. The opponent, however, runs up from the goalkeeper's right, steps in, and kicks the ball into the net for a goal.

In the second clip (an international match between Trinidad-Tobago and Bahrain), we again have the ball clearly controlled by the goalkeeper who tosses it slightly into the air with the obvious intent of punting the ball away. An opponent, who was following the goalkeeper's movement forward from the right hand side, kicks the ball as it leaves the goalkeeper's hands and is approximately chest high.

The critical difference between these two situations, and why the goal must count in the first but not in the second, hinges on when the goalkeeper has released the ball into play. By placing the ball on the ground, the English Premier goalkeeper had relinquished control. The Trinidad-Tobago goalkeeper was still in the process of releasing the ball when it was kicked by the opponent – it was still in the control of the goalkeeper even though it was not physically in his hands. The "toss into the air" was merely preparatory to or an integral part of the distribution process.

Accordingly, the “act of distribution” includes the process of setting the ball on the ground, throwing the ball away, punting the ball (kicking it directly from the release), and drop kicking the ball (kicking the ball after it is released and hits the ground). An opponent commits an offense by challenging for the ball before any of these acts of distribution is completed. An opponent may also commit an offense if the opponent is so close to the goalkeeper that an attempt to challenge for the ball immediately following the act of distribution would, in the opinion of the referee, be considered interference with the release of the ball into play or as playing in a dangerous manner.

The current “Questions and Answers on the Laws of the Game” includes a question regarding this matter (#19 under Law 12). FIFA asks if it is permitted for an opponent to play the ball before it hits the ground “as a goalkeeper releases the ball to kick it into play” and answers that it is not because “the releasing of the ball” and “the kicking of the ball” are considered to be “a single action.”