

WHAT IS THE "ADVANTAGE RULE" AND WHY SHOULD YOU KNOW IT?

By: Peter Rich, AYSO Region 58 Referee Staff

Have you ever wondered why a center referee often doesn't blow the whistle? Immediately -- or at all -- when an obvious foul has been committed? Chances are that, in order to avoid benefiting the team that committed the foul, the center referee is applying the "advantage rule" -- perhaps the least understood rule in soccer.

Soccer Law V, the Referee Law, contains the following clause: "[The Referee] allows play to continue when the team against which an offence has been committed will benefit from such an advantage and penalises the original offense if the anticipated advantage does not ensue at that time." As a practical matter, what does this mean? The center referee must make a snap judgment whether he should blow the whistle immediately or wait two to three seconds to see whether the team that was fouled would be denied an "advantage" if the foul is whistled and play is stopped for the appropriate free kick.

The most obvious example would be an immediate breakaway by the player who was fouled --or someone he passed to on his team. If the center referee believes that it is appropriate to apply the advantage rule, s/he may say "Advantage!" or "Play on", or simply raise both of his arms in a forward motion palms upward. However, if the apparent advantage fails to materialize within a few seconds, the center referee may whistle the initial foul and bring the ball back to the spot of the foul for the appropriate free kick.

The "advantage" once given by the referee may or may not lead to a goal-scoring opportunity; the idea is that it would be unfair to the team that was fouled to deny them a goalscoring opportunity by a premature whistle! However, if too much time elapses from the spot of the initial foul to the point in time when the referee determines the advantage did not materialize, the referee will not whistle the foul since, having played the "advantage"; it would be unfair to do so. But if the foul was serious, the referee always has the right to issue a card at the next stoppage in play.

Here is the hard part for most fans to understand: refereeing is an art, not a science. There are no specific hard and fast rules on when it is appropriate to invoke the advantage rule. Thus, the center referee is required to use his or her best judgment (and may choose to overrule an assistant referee who flags the foul) based on the center referee's immediate perception of the flow of play and what is necessary to control the match. Players, coaches and spectators on the team against which the foul is committed should keep in mind that it is wise for the referee to wait a few moments before whistling a foul to make sure your team does not lose a possible goal-scoring opportunity.

So the next time you're playing, coaching or watching a game and your team is apparently fouled without a foul being whistled immediately by the referee, wait and watch what happens instead of automatically assuming assume that the referees missed the call.

The goal that results may be your own!