

# HANDBALL

## (A) The Law

Law 12 states that: “A direct free kick is also awarded to the opposing team if a player *handles the ball deliberately...*”

Handling the ball is a foul when a player touches the ball with *any part of the hand or arm while intending to control the ball.*

Therefore, by definition there is no foul if a player:

- is not trying to control the ball; or,
- is instinctively protecting himself or herself from injury; or,
- the ball “accidentally” hits the players arm or hand.

The major task for any referee then is to differentiate between deliberate v. accidental handling.

## (B) Intentional v. Accidental Handling

The most obvious handball is where the player reaches out to touch or control the ball, or move his hand to intercept it or change its path. Examples include: (1) the defender who reaches up to knock a ball down that was going over his head; or (2) the player who, while trying to deal with a ball bouncing erratically, sticks his hand out so as to put to the ball at his feet; and (3) the really obvious ones, like stopping a shot going into the goal, or using a hand to stop a pass that might produce a scoring chance. In these situations the player moves his hand toward the ball in an effort to touch it or move it—or as the old saying goes, moves *“hand to ball”*.

So, when you think you see a 'handball' in other situations, ask yourself these questions:

- (1) Did the player move his hand or arm deliberately to handle the ball?

If the answer is “**yes**,” then you have witnessed an infringement of the laws, and you may penalize; or if the “handled” ball goes straight to an opponent, allow play to continue( “advantage”).

If the answer is “**no**,” then allow play to proceed. If the answer is “**I am not sure**” then do not call a foul.

- (2) Was the movement of the hand or arm an instinctive act of protection for the face, the groin or in the case of young female players, the breast?

*Young players especially deserve the benefit of doubt in these cases. Their instinct is to protect vulnerable parts of their body especially ones that hurt when struck hard. This is not a foul!*

- (3) Was there some other factor that could have caused the contact between the ball and the hand or the arm?

Sometimes the pitch is bumpy and as a result the ball pops-up unpredictably. When in such cases, the ball makes contact with the hand or arm; it could be the playing surface and not the action of the player that created the 'handball' [ “ball to hand”]. This is not a foul!

***One final point of great importance: in the case of accidental contact between the ball and the hand or arm, even if the ball drops to the benefit of the player who made contact with it, you must not penalize. Where there is no infraction, no infraction can be called!***

### **(C) Advanced Inquiry for U19/16 Games**

**Question:** Can there be a violation of Law 12 when a player's hand does not deliberately move "hand to ball"?

Think about the wall during a free kick near the goal: suppose a player kicks the ball hard toward the goal, aiming to curve the ball around the end of the wall and a defender at the end of the wall has his hands down to his side, but realizes the ball is going to hit his arm and deflect from its path toward goal. The player decides to leave his arm in a position knowing the ball will strike his arm. He has time to move it, but chooses not to, and as a result, blocks the shot on the goal. If we analyze the play with the old adage, was this ball to *hand or hand to ball*, the player has apparently committed no infraction. Yet, this is an example of why this old piece of referee wisdom - - - like so many - - - is useful only up to a point.

If the player had time to move his hand out of the way, but chose instead to leave it where it was, then you have witnessed an infringement of the law, and you may choose to penalize ! However, if the shot was taken so close to the defender that he did not have had time to get out of its way, then there is no breach of the law, and no matter how many people shout about it, you must let play go on. This analysis encompasses the spirit of Law 12!

#### **(D) Conclusion**

Many inexperienced referees are over zealous to call a handball - if you add the pressure that parents or spectators unfamiliar with the game shout every time the ball touches a hand or arm - the tendency is for the inexperienced referee is to blow his whistle in response. This can only makes matters worse. The lack of knowledge of the spectators/coaches combined with players reacting as if someone was guilty of touching a holy relic, is reinforced by the referee. It takes a great deal of strength and conviction for a referee to be oblivious to the dozens of voices baying in unison, and to ignore the pleas of the players asking for you to call a "handball". But that is exactly your job!

***So think about these issues before the game starts and train yourself to respond accordingly!***

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<sup>1</sup> ***Authorship credit to Robert Evens [former USSF Director of Referee Instruction] and James Osborne, AYSO National<sup>2</sup> Referee; RRA Region 58.***