

Common Soccer Misconceptions

The "Hand Ball" Call

Hand Ball (or "handling" as it's now officially known) is commonly misunderstood to be any contact of the ball to hand or arm, or any contact to the hand or arm that provides advantage to the offending team.

It is neither of these.

Instead, the question of if contact of the ball to the arm or hand is a foul is not is one of mere contact, but rather did the player **deliberately** make contact (or not avoid contact) with the ball with that area of the body? If the answer is yes (and the player isn't a goalkeeper in the penalty area), you have a foul; but if the referee believes the answer is no (even if it results in a goal!), then the answer must be no.

Here's the Proof:

United States Soccer Federation's Advice to Referees on the Laws of the Game, revised October 15, 2003 (available in the Referee section of ussoccer.com). Note the italicized section that talks about gaining an advantage from inadvertent contact:

12.9 DELIBERATE HANDLING

The offense known as "handling the ball" involves deliberate contact with the ball by a player's hand or arm (including fingertips, or outer shoulder). "Deliberate contact" means that the player could have avoided the touch but chose not to, that the player's arms were not in a normal playing position at the time, or that the player deliberately continued an initially accidental contact for the purpose of gaining an unfair advantage. Moving hands or arms instinctively to protect the body when suddenly faced with a fast approaching ball does not constitute deliberate contact unless there is subsequent action to direct the ball once contact is made. Likewise, placing hands or arms to protect the body at a free kick or similar restart is not likely to produce an infringement unless there is subsequent action to direct or control the ball. *The fact that a player may benefit from the ball contacting the hand does not transform the otherwise accidental event into an infringement* [emphasis added]. A player infringes the Law regarding handling the ball even if direct contact is avoided by holding something in the hand (clothing, shinguard, etc.).

FIFA's Laws of the Game, an excerpt from Law 12 (available at fifa.com):

A direct free kick is also awarded to the opposing team if a player commits any of the following four offenses:

- *tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball*
- *holds and opponent*
- *spits at an opponent*
- *handles the ball deliberately (except for the goalkeeper within his own penalty area)*

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