



To: U.S. Soccer Referees  
State Referee Committee Members  
National Referee Coaches

From: Rick Eddy  
Director of Referee Development

Subject: Denying a goal or obvious goal scoring opportunity

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Law 12 provides that a defender whose violation of the Law prevents a goal or denies an obvious goal-scoring opportunity must be sent off and shown the red card. The "professional foul" which is committed in a cynical attempt to prevent opponents from scoring requires a quick, firm response by the referee. Such misconduct by the defender overshadows the severity of the foul itself.

In order for a player to be sent off for denying an "obvious goal-scoring opportunity," four elements must be present:

- Location and number of Defenders : not more than one defender between the foul and the goal, not counting the defender who committed the foul
- Distance between the offense and the goal : the closer the foul is to the goal, the more likely it is an obvious goal scoring opportunity
- Likelihood of keeping or gaining control of the ball: the attacker must have been close enough to the ball at the time of the foul to have continued playing the ball
- General direction of play: the attacker must have been moving toward the goal at the time the foul was committed

If any element is missing, there can be no send off for denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity. In that case a caution for stopping a promising attack (SPA) is warranted. Further, the presence of each of these elements must be "obvious" in order for the send-off to be appropriate under this provision of Law 12.

Referees are also reminded that when the goalkeeper commits an offense outside of the penalty area and the goal is unprotected while the elements above are clearly present, a send-off for DOGSO is required, not a yellow card for SPA.

However, the foul might, by itself, warrant a card - a caution for unsporting behavior, for example, if the challenge was reckless or a send-off if the challenge was using excessive force or violent. If the foul by the defender is both violent and qualifies as an obvious goal-scoring opportunity offense misconduct, the referee should include both facts in the game report but must only list one official reason for the red card.

Referees are reminded that offenses which deny a goal-scoring opportunity are not limited to those punishable by a direct free kick or penalty kick but may include fouls for which the restart is an indirect free kick such as playing in a dangerous manner, impeding the progress of an opponent without contact, or committing any other offense not mentioned in the Laws. Therefore, if such indirect free kick offense denies a goal-scoring opportunity, then the offending player is sent off