

Teaching players the offside rule

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One of the most debated and contested laws in football is the Offside Rule, and the definitions of “interfering with play”, “interfering with an opponent” and “gaining an advantage” can further complicate the decision of whether a player is in an offside position or not.

Law 11: Offside

It is not an offence in itself to be in an offside position. According to the International Football Association Board's (IFAB's) Laws of the Game, a player is determined to be in an offside position if “they are nearer to the opponents’ goal line than both the ball and the second-last opponent.”

A player is not in an offside position if they are in their own half of the field of play, if they are level with the second-last opponent or if they are level with the last two opponents, at the moment the ball is played by one of their team.

Also, a player cannot be offside if they are behind the ball when it is passed.

Committing an offside offence

If an offside offence is called, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposition, taken from the position of the offending player when the ball was last played to them.

The player is determined to be in an offside position at the moment the ball is played, not when it is received.



Free Kicks and the Offside Rule

The offside rule is in effect during free kicks and player(s) that are in an offside position when the free kick is played, and are involved in active play (interfering with play, an opponent or gaining an advantage by being in that position), will be judged to be offside and an indirect free kick is awarded to the opposition.

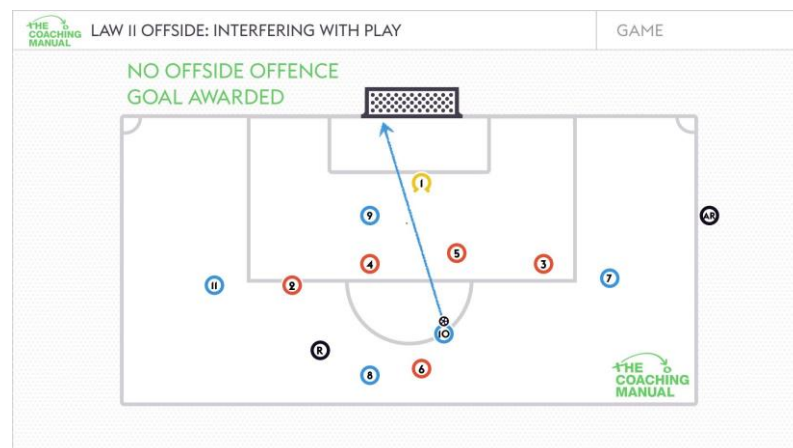
Offside definitions “Nearer to the opponents’ goal line”

A player is deemed to be in an offside position if any part of a player’s body is nearer to the opponents’ goal line than both the ball and the second last opponent. The arms are not included in this definition.

“Interfering with play”

This refers to an attacking player (blue 9), who is not interfering with an opponent, touches the ball that is passed or touched by a team-mate. The assistant referee must raise the flag when the player touches the ball.

If the attacker (blue 9) is in an offside position but is not interfering with an opponent and does not touch the ball, the player cannot be penalised for an offside offence. Additionally, if a player in an offside position (blue 9) runs towards the ball and a team-mate in an onside position (blue 10) also runs towards the ball and plays it, blue 9 cannot be penalised, unless, in the opinion of the referee, neither blue 10 nor other team-mate in an onside position has the opportunity to play the ball, or blue 9 had interfered with red players getting to the ball.



“Interfering with an opponent”

If a player is in an offside position and prevents an opponent from playing or being able to play the ball by clearly obstructing the opponent’s line of vision or challenging an opponent for the ball, the player will be penalised for an offside offence.

Obstructing the opponent’s line of vision

The attacker in an offside position (blue 9) is obstructing the goalkeeper’s line of vision and an offside offence is called.

If blue 9 in the above scenario was on the corner of the 6 yard box and was not obstructing the view of the goalkeeper, it is not judged an offside offence and a goal would be awarded.

Challenging an opponent for the ball

The attacker in an offside position (blue 9) runs towards the ball but does not prevent the opponent (red 5) from playing or being able to play the ball. As blue 9 is not challenging red 5 for the ball, it is deemed as not interfering with an opponent and as an offside call is unnecessary, a corner kick to the blue team is given.

If in the same scenario, the attacker in an offside position (blue 9) runs towards the ball preventing the opponent (red 5) from playing the ball by challenging the opponent, the assistant referee will flag for offside, as blue 9 is interfering with an opponent from an offside position.

“Gaining an advantage by being in that position”

If a player, having been in an offside position, plays a ball that rebounds or is deflected off the goalpost, crossbar or an opponent, they are penalised for an offside offence.

Furthermore, if a ball rebounds or is deflected from a deliberate save by an opponent (red 5) is played to a player in an offside position (blue 9), they have gained an advantage by being in that position and an offside offence is given.

If a player in an offside position (blue 9) receives the ball from an opponent (red 3), who deliberately plays the ball (except from a deliberate save), the receiving player (blue 9) is not considered to have gained an advantage and is not offside.

Infringements

Any defending player that leaves the field for any reason without the referee’s permission is considered to be on their own goal line or touch line for the purposes of offside, until the next stoppage in play.

This scenario occurred in a Champions League fixture between Manchester United and CSKA Moscow. A shot was deflected off Moscow player Alan Dzagoev, who appeared to be in an offside position, and the goal was awarded by the officials to the outrage of Man United players and fans. However, Manchester United’s Daley Blind had slid off the Old Trafford pitch and, as he wasn’t given permission to leave the field of play, Blind was considered to be playing Dzagoev offside.

It is not an offence in itself for a player who is in an offside position to step off the field of play to show the referee that they are not involved in active play. However, if the referee considers that the player has left the field of play for tactical reasons and has gained an unfair advantage by re-entering the field of play, the player must be cautioned for unsporting behaviour. The player needs to ask for the referee’s permission to re-enter the field of play.

