



# MEMORANDUM

**TO:** TUCSON METRO SOCCER LEAGUE  
**FROM:** BOB BARTON  
Asst. State Director of Assessment Arizona  
**SUBJECT:** APPLICATION OF OFFSIDE  
**DATE:** DECEMBER 21, 2016

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I have received many questions by players and Board Members from TMSL regarding what appears to be delayed enforcement by Assistant Referees of an offside infraction during the run of play, since the implementation of the Fall 2016/2017 rule updates.

Rules applicable to Offside are found in Law 11 (page 76) of the International Football Association Board (IFAB) rulebook, Laws of the Game 2016/2017.

Although there are several pages of the rules dedicated to offside issues, the primary information regarding playing or being involved in play from an offside position is below.

## 2. Offside offence

A player in an offside position at the moment the ball is played or touched by a team-mate is **only penalized** on becoming involved in active play by:

- **interfering with play by playing or touching a ball passed or touched by a team-mate or**
- interfering with an opponent by: >> preventing 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 or >> clearly attempting to play a ball which is close to him when this action impacts on an opponent or >> making an obvious action which clearly impacts on the ability of an opponent to play the ball or
- gaining an advantage by playing the ball or interfering with an opponent when it has:
  - >> rebounded or been deflected off the goalpost, crossbar or an opponent
  - >>been deliberately saved by any opponent

A player in an offside position receiving the ball from **an opponent who deliberately plays the ball** (except from a deliberate save by any opponent) is not considered to have gained an advantage.

A 'save' is when a player stops a ball which is going into or very close to the goal with any part of the body except the hands (unless the goalkeeper within the penalty area).

The IFBA rules index defines playing the ball as:

**Played:** Action by a player which **makes contact with the ball**

The recent concern raised by players is that Assistant Referees are waiting too long to raise their offside flag. In particular, when an attacker is attempting to catch up to a through ball, and only after a long run when the player reaches the ball, does the referee raise the offside flag.

The current instruction to referees is, per the noted rules, the offside infraction is only penalized (raised flag) when the offside player interferes with play or touches (makes contact) with the ball.

Another question that has come up is the interpretation of a defender “deliberately playing the ball” vs. “deflection.”

An offside infraction only occurs when a player in an offside position receives the ball from a teammate. If a player in an offside position receives a ball from an opponent, there is no offside infraction.

A ball that is last played by a teammate that deflects off an opponent, that is received by a player in an offside position at the time the ball was played is an offside infraction. For clarity, a deflection is when the ball bounces or skims off a defender who has not made any effort to play the ball.

A defender who plays or attempts to play a ball, even if they do it poorly, is still a circumstance where the ball was last played by a defender.

Consider a long, high ball played to an attacking player who was in an offside position. A defender attempts to head the ball away and the ball slides off the top of the defender’s head and the ball is gathered by the attacking player. In this circumstance, the ball was last played by the defender, be it poorly, and there is no offside infraction.

Please remember that our referee staff has varied levels of experience and training. We do the best we can to get them all on the same page, and provide additional training and instruction whenever possible. The overriding principle in the application of the Laws of the Game is, Fouls – Infractions – Advantage – Trifling Events, are all based on the “opinion of the Referee, which is stressed in the rule book. I recognize that that we all have opinions, and a player’s opinion and a referee’s may not coincide, but the referees are constantly making call / no call decisions with the desire to keep the game safe and fair for both sides.

I hope that this clarification of offside is helpful.