

Dear parents, carers, coaches, players and officials,

Welcome to the second instalment of **Ask the Ref.** for 2011. This is a re-issue and update of the regular bulletins issued by the Adelaide Hills Referee Branch covering and discussing a particular local arrangement, rule or law of the game.

The Ask the Ref bulletins, while designed for newcomers to the game, should be informative to anyone who is involved in the competition, and we, the referees, encourage you to take a few minutes to read the bulletin whether you have been around the game for ages or are just starting out on the journey.

Our second bulletin looks at **handballs**.

Ask the Ref 2011 number two.

The call for 'hand ball' is a common cry from players, spectators and coaches alike. This week's Ask the Ref, the second for 2011, looks at the issue of handball.

Let's clarify something first. Law 12 of the FIFA Laws of the Game states that it is an offence if a player "handles the ball **deliberately** (except for the goalkeeper within his own penalty area)" This means that is not a foul if the ball touches a player's hand. It is only a foul if the player **intentionally** handles the ball.

Therefore, all of those times that a player kicks the ball right into a player's hand or the ball bounces up on an uneven pitch (there are plenty of those in the Hills) and hits a player's hand or arm, these are not fouls and should not be called.

Nowhere in the Laws of the Game does it say anything about it **being a foul** if the player whose hand or arm the ball has touched **gains an advantage**. In other words, even if the ball were to hit a player's arm and drop right at his feet or even if it were to go directly into his or her opponents' goal, these are not fouls if they were unintentional acts. As recently as 1996 FIFA specifically changed the laws to make it very clear that a foul has only been committed when the player handles the ball deliberately.

So how can one tell if a handball is intentional or not? First, if a ball, such as a clearance out of the defence, hits a player so fast that they have no time to react then this cannot be a handball. Likewise, bouncing balls that come up at an unexpected angle and hit a player's arm, or a ball that hit a player's arm when his or her back is turned are generally not fouls.

On the other hand, when a player uses his or her hand at their side to control a ball that comes in at waist level or has time to reach out and touch a ball, or jumps up to block a kick with arms outstretched so increasing the possibility of touching the ball, then these clearly should be called. A good rule-of-thumb to use is if the player's hand comes to the ball, it is a foul. If the ball goes to the hand, it is not a foul; more commonly known as 'ball to hand', or 'hand to ball'.

Now, having said all of that, in female football and for female football players in general, it has been accepted practice to allow for players to protect themselves in vulnerable areas, (it is the same for males when in the wall for a free kick, there is one particular part of the body they usually want to protect). If the ball is zooming at the chest area for females and will hurt the player they have the right to protect themselves. Instinctively players will use their arms and hands to protect themselves. This has to be judged by the referee on the spot and we should err on the side of the player.

However, one factor to take into consideration is whether the player has an alternative. Could they have used their upper chest area to control the ball; could they have used their head or another part of their body; could they have got out of the way? Another consideration is the distance from the player who kicked the ball and how much time the receiver had to react?

The less experienced the player the more chance that they will be afraid of the ball in general and will use their arms to protect themselves when they don't really need to. As players have more coaching and become more skilful, this becomes less common.

In the end, it is the referee's decision whether a player intentionally handles a ball or not and of course spectators and players may have a different opinion (that they should keep to themselves). I know I had a few of 50/50 handball calls to make in a match last weekend and they were all, without exception, accepted in a good, sporting spirit.

By the way, your "hand" in this context includes the entire arm from the shoulder down! Hmm!

Thanks for reading this email. I hope you enjoyed it. It may have raised more questions than offered answers. If so, there are many football websites and referee resources that discuss these and other matters. I encourage you to seek these out.

For the law on fouls including handball check out slides 16 through 19 of:

http://www.fifa.com/mm/document/afdeveloping/refereeing/law_12_fouls_misconduct_en_47379.pdf

This one is fun if long and with a good Q and A section:

<http://corshamref.org.uk/law12/law12hand.htm>

Cheers

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