

Ask the Ref # 9, 2011 – Abandoned and Postponed games.

Hi all football enthusiasts, coaches, referees, players and long suffering parents,

Welcome to the next slightly edited edition of Ask the Ref, the Adelaide Hills Referee Branch's nearly weekly bulletin on the rules of the game that is sent out each year.



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This week we look in more detail at situations that could result in a game NOT being played (fortunately not a problem so far this season but more rain is forecast!).

Why do referees call off games?

Let's clarify two terms first. A **postponed** game is when a referee or the AHRB calls off a game before kick off. An **abandoned** game is one that is called off after the kick off. The association decides on results and replays, not the referee.

Upon arrival at a ground, usually at least 30 minutes prior to kick off, the referee will assess the condition of the pitch and decide whether it is safe to play or not. Safety of the players is the main factor. In the Hills the main issue is usually **water**, although there are other issues that can develop. The Hills referees are told that if pools of standing water are present then games cannot reasonably be played safely.

Excessively **muddy** grounds can also make a pitch unplayable. Other factors are large holes or deep divots and exposed drainage or sprinkling systems (all **trip hazards**). The referee will consult with other officials but in the end it is his or her final call as to whether a pitch is safe to play on or not.

Apart from the water issue, many other problems can be quickly rectified and games can go ahead, but the referee's sole concern is safety and nothing else. In addition, it is acknowledged that clubs also have a long term interest in maintaining the pitch condition for the rest of the season and often an obligation to the organisation using the pitch during the rest of the week (e.g. a school). Therefore the referee must take the concerns of club officials into account if necessary.

Other matters that may cause a game to not go ahead concern the readiness of the pitch and the essential set up requirements not being met.

Pitch markings

A pitch needs to have all markings, as outlined in the FIFA Laws of the Game and any modifications, as per the AHJSA competition rules and modified rules. The compulsory markings include the touchline, goal line, halfway line, centre circle, centre mark, corner arcs, penalty area, penalty arc, penalty mark and the goal area.

Flag posts

Flag posts of no less than 1.5 metres in length must be placed at each corner. These must not have a pointed top. Optional markings include, a flag post at each end of the halfway mark, not less than 1 metre outside the touchline, and also markings 9.15 m from the corner arc at right angles to the goal lines and touch lines to ensure that players retreat the required distance during corner kicks.

Goals

Goal posts must be white and are placed at equal distances on each goal line. Goals must be anchored securely to the ground; portable goals can only be used if they satisfy this requirement. Funnily enough, goal nets are not a compulsory item and games can go ahead without them. However, where nets are in place they must be secure and must not interfere with the players, in particular the goal keeper. One thing to watch for is a sagging net that can easily be tangled up in a keeper's arm.

Match ball

The match ball needs to be of the appropriate size for the age group and be inflated to the recommended minimum and must satisfy the referee.

Number of players

The minimum number of players in the competitive leagues is seven. If a team playing with only seven players loses one of these players to injury or one is sent off then the game is abandoned.

Other reasons for abandoning after kick off can be if the weather turns nasty and **conditions become dangerous**. Games can be delayed while wild weather passes, for instance with hailstorms, which are normally short lived, or thunder and lightning. But if conditions persist then games are best called off for everyone's sake.

Avoidable circumstances

The referee may have to call a game off due to the **behaviour** of spectators, players or coaches. Highly charged games that become inflamed for whatever reasons can be abandoned if, in the opinion of the referee, the players' safety is at risk. Most of the Hills coaches and supporters are well behaved, but we all know that some people can act inappropriately at times. Such behaviour does influence young players and if it causes them to act more aggressively on the pitch then the referee has the right to abandon the game.

Adult spectators aggressively and inappropriately abusing the referee and challenging decisions can also be a factor. Again, this kind of thing will influence players to also act inappropriately on the pitch. Thankfully these cases are few and far between in our competition and are clearly **against the rules of the AHJSA**. The Hills competition is one that we all believe is played with a competitive but sporting spirit.

Clubs are given a 10 minute grace period from the scheduled time of kick off to have the pitch in a suitable condition for play. If, after 10 minutes, conditions are not met, the referee postpones the game. A decision about results or playing the game again is taken by the AHJSA not the referee.

Nobody likes to call a game off and, as most of the Hills referees are young, it can be a daunting prospect to have upset players, coaches, parents, carers and other supporters willing you on to go ahead with the game. In most cases everyone knows that the game should be called off, or at least suspect that it might be, and it comes as a relief for most. Some have, in the past, verbally pressured a referee for making such a decision. That is why we ask for your support when a referee does decide to abandon a game. It is just that, a game, after all.

See <http://www.ahjsa.asn.au/> for all relevant documents from the AHJSA.

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