

Deliberately Handling the Ball (Law 12)

Quick Criteria (Train the Brain):

1. Making yourself bigger (gaining tactical advantage by closing the space avail. to opponent with ball)
2. Is the arm or hand in an "unnatural position?"
3. Did the player "benefit?" (gain a tactical advantage by DHB)

If still unclear, then use:

4. Reaction Time (slow ball/fast-unexpected ball, distance of ball to player who DHB)
5. Hand / arm to ball (body readjustment to contact ball)

FIFA LOTG, AYSO edition 2009-2010:

Law 12 (@p. 111)

Handling the ball involves a deliberate act of a player making contact with the ball with his hand or arm. The referee must take the following into consideration:

- The movement of the hand towards the ball (not the ball towards the hand)
- The distance between the opponent and the ball (unexpected ball)
- The position of the hand does not necessarily mean that there is an infringement
- Touching the ball with an object held in the hand...
- Hitting the ball with a thrown object...

Advice to Referees 2009-2010:

12.9-12.11 (p. 49)

12.9 DELIBERATE HANDLING

The offense known as "handling the ball" involves deliberate contact with the ball by a player's hand or arm (including fingertips, upper arm, or outer shoulder). "Deliberate contact" means that the player could have avoided the touch but chose not to, that the player's arms were not in a normal playing position at the time, or that the player deliberately continued an initially accidental contact for the purpose of gaining an unfair advantage. Moving hands or arms instinctively to protect the body when suddenly faced with a fast approaching ball does not constitute deliberate contact unless there is subsequent action to direct the ball once contact is made. Likewise, placing hands or arms to protect the body at a free kick or similar restart is not likely to produce an infringement unless there is subsequent action to direct or control the ball. The fact that a player may benefit from the ball contacting the hand does not transform the otherwise accidental event into an infringement. A player infringes the Law regarding handling the ball even if direct contact is avoided by holding something in the hand (clothing, shinguard, etc.).

NOTE: In most cases in the Laws of the Game, the words "touch," "play," and "make contact with" mean the same thing. This is not true in the case of deliberate handling, where the touch, play, or contact by the offending player must be planned and deliberate.

12.10 RULE OF THUMB FOR "HANDLING"

The rule of thumb for referees is that it is handling if the player plays the ball, but not handling if the ball plays the player. The referee should punish only deliberate handling of the ball, meaning only those actions when the player (and not the goalkeeper within the 'keeper's own penalty area) strikes or propels the ball with the hand or arm (shoulder to tip of fingers).

12.11 USE OF THE SHOULDER

For purposes of determining deliberate handling of the ball, the "hand" is considered to be any part of the arm-hand from fingertip to shoulder. Using the top of the shoulder is not considered as using the hand. (A diagram showing the area of "the hand" is shown [in the ATR].)

From USSF Memo Feb. 2, 2009

The following 3 criteria should be the primary factors considered by the referee:

1. Making yourself bigger

This refers to the placement of the arm(s)/hand(s) of the defending player at the time the ball is played by the opponent. Should an arm/hand be in a position that takes away space from the team with the ball and the ball contacts the arm/hand, the referee should interpret this contact as handling. Referees should interpret this action as the defender “deliberately” putting his arm/hand in a position in order to reduce the options of the opponent (like spreading your arms wide to take away the passing lane of an attacker).

- Does the defender use his hand/arm as a barrier?
- Does the defender use his hand/arm to take away space and/or the passing lane from the opponent?
- Does the defender use his hand/arm to occupy more space by extending his reach or extending the ability of his body to play the ball thereby benefiting from the extension(s)?

2. Is the arm or hand in an “unnatural position?”

Is the arm or hand in a position that is not normal or natural for a player performing the task at hand.

3. Did the player “benefit?”

In considering all the “signs” described above, the referee should also consider the result of the player’s (usually a defender) action. Did the defender’s action (handling of the ball) deny an opportunity (for example, a pass or shot on goal) that would have otherwise been available to the opponent? Did the offending player gain an unfair tactical advantage from contact with the hand/arm which enabled him to retain possession? In other words: Did the player benefit by putting his hand/arm in an “unnatural position?” The referee needs to be able to quickly calculate the result of the player’s action to determine whether an offence has been committed.

After applying the aforementioned criteria, if the referee is still uncertain as to whether handling the ball has occurred, the referee should then incorporate the following two criteria as part of his decision making process:

4. Reaction Time

The less time a defender has to react, the less likely there has been a handling offense. For example, a ball struck from a close distance, or a very fast moving ball, or a ball coming in from a direction which is outside the defender’s view gives little or no time for the defender’s reaction to be “deliberate.” The referee must take into consideration whether the defender’s reaction is purely instinctive, taken to protect sensitive areas of the body as the face. Distance is a factor in determining “reaction time.” The further the ball, the more reaction time a play may have.

5. Hand / arm to ball

Referees must be ready to judge whether the player moved his arm to the ball thereby initiating the contact. Additionally, the referee should evaluate whether the player deliberately readjusted his body position to block the ball thus intentionally playing the ball with his hand/arm.