

There Is No Such Thing As A Hand Ball! Its Called Handling the Ball– Part of Law 12

[Law 12, “Fouls and Misconduct,”](#) of the IFAB *Laws of the Game*, states that:

“A direct free kick is awarded [to the opposing team] if a player... handles the ball deliberately (except for the goalkeeper within his own penalty area).“

“Handling the ball involves a deliberate act of a player making contact with the ball with the hand or arm. The following must be considered:

- 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 (clothing, shinguard, etc.) is an infringement
- hitting the ball with a thrown object (boot, shinguard, etc.) is an infringement”

There are two significant points concerning application of the handling rule during the normal run of play. The first has to do with the parts of the body which contact the ball and the second has to do with the judgment of the Referee.

The parts of the body subject to the handling rule are both the hands and the arms, extending from the tips of the fingers to the articulation of the shoulder. The fact that the ball may contact the hands or the arms during the course of the game is not sufficient, in and of itself, for a penalty to be called. In order for a violation to have occurred, the Referee (or Assistant Referee) must have seen the contact and **must have judged that the contact was intentional (deliberate).**

In order to determine that the contact with the ball was intentional, the Referee uses two general criteria:

1. **If the player moved his hand or arm to the ball; or,**
2. **If the player had sufficient reaction time to move his hand or arm out of the way of the flight of the ball and failed to do so.**

If, in the opinion of the Referee, either of these two acts occurred, “handling” should be called. If the contact was determined to have been unintentional, then play is allowed to

continue, no matter how or where the ball was contacted and no matter what happens next to the path of the ball.

Difficulty with the application of the handling rule mostly occurs at the youth level where few hand balls are truly intentional. However, players must learn to keep their hands and arms out of situations where they could inappropriately influence play. In order to do so, coaches must teach young field players to keep their hands near their sides when the ball is bouncing around and to overcome the desire brought on by American sports such as football, basketball and baseball, to try to catch the ball. In addition, coaches must teach young players to overcome the natural tendency to protect the body from a fast moving ball, particularly the face, by blocking it with their hands. Instead, they may first duck or turn the body, but as they get older they must learn to aggressively strike, deflect, or absorb the pace of, the ball.

Soccer Coaching Tip:

- Even adult players run afoul of having their arms in the wrong place, usually outstretched above their head, and wonder why handling is called when they are hit by the ball without sufficient time to remove their arm. They need to be taught that this is an “unnatural” position to the sport and not to have their arm there.