

Understanding FIFA Law 11: Offside

One of the most difficult laws of the game to understand and enforce is Offside. There are times during a game when a player can be in an offside position, but not violate the offside law. There are other times when a player receives the ball while not in an offside position that still violates the offside law. Finally, there are areas of the field, as well as moments during a game, in which the offside law doesn't apply at all.

The purpose of this document is to help explain what is and what is not offside and to explain along with simple scenarios that often occur during game to paint a clear picture of Law 11 - Offside.

Offside position

It is not an offense in itself to be in an offside position.

A player is in an offside position if:

- he is nearer to his opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second-last opponent

A player is not in an offside position if:

- he is in his own half of the field of play or
- he is level with the second-last opponent or
- he is level with the last two opponents

Offense

A player in an offside position is only penalized if, at the moment the ball touches or is played by one of his team, he is, in the opinion of the referee, involved in active play by:

- interfering with play or
- interfering with an opponent or
- gaining an advantage by being in that position

No offense

There is no offside offense if a player receives the ball directly from:

- a goal kick
- a throw-in
- a corner kick

Infringements and sanctions

In the event of an offside offense, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team to be taken from the place where the infringement occurred.

Let's continue by looking at several examples of what is and what is not offside. Please note that all diagrams are shown on half of a field since, as the law states, you cannot be offside in your own half of the field.

Diagram 1:



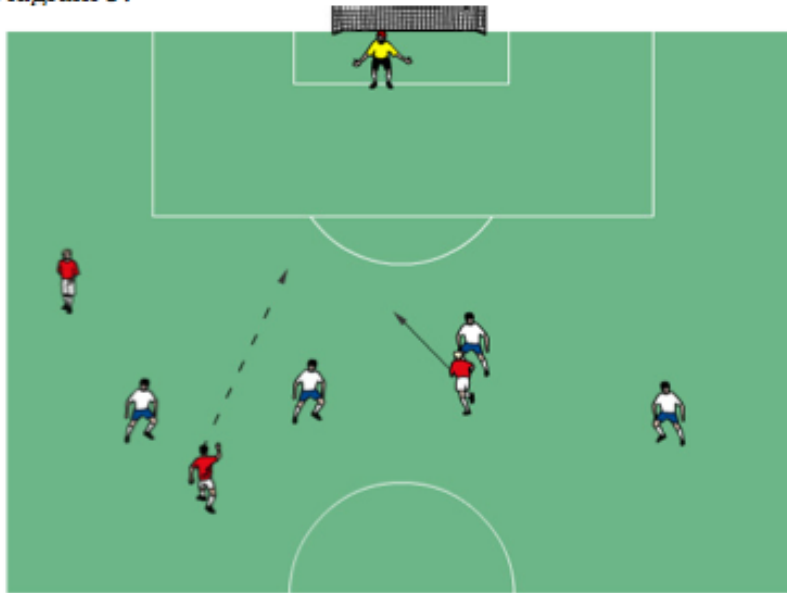
In Diagram 1, the Red player would not be **offside** since he is level with the second to last defender (the goalie being the last defender) when the ball is played. Even if Red is behind the second to last defender when he receives the ball he is still not considered offside since he was level when the ball was played!

Diagram 2:



In Diagram 2, the Red player would be ruled **offside**. The Red attacker is in front of the second to last defender when the ball is played.

Diagram 3:



In Diagram 3, Is there a Red player in an offside position? Yes. Is the Red team in violation of the Law 11? No! Although the Red left wing is in an offside position, he is not violating the offside rule since he is not interfering with the play or gaining an advantage by being “nearer to his opponents’ goal line than both the ball and the second to last opponent.”

Diagram 4:



In Diagram 4, Does Red receive the ball in an offside position? No. Does Red violate the offside law? Yes! The Red player should be ruled offside since he was in an offside position **when the ball was played.**

Diagram 5:

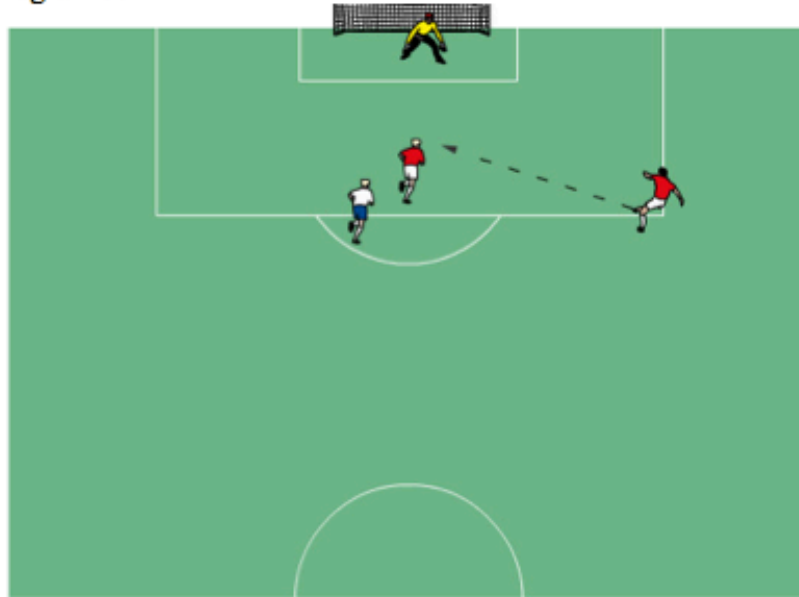
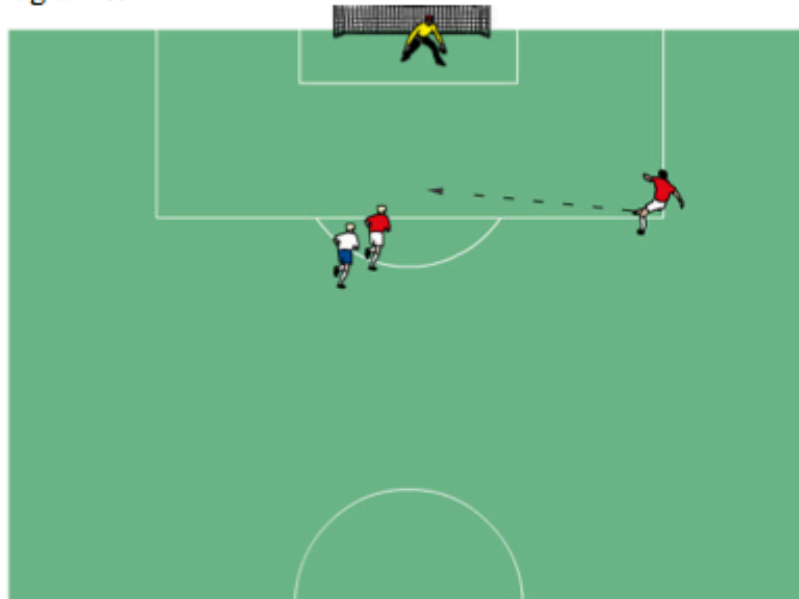


Diagram 6:



In Diagrams 5 and 6 a nearly identical situation unfolds. In both cases the player receiving the ball is nearer to his opponents' goal line than the second to last opponent. However, in Diagram 5 the player receiving the ball is offside, while in Diagram 6 the attacker is not. Why? In Diagram 6 the player receiving the ball is behind the ball when it was played. **You cannot be in an offside position if you are behind the ball at the moment it is played!** Although the difference of the attacking player receiving the ball in diagrams 5 & 6 is only a yard or two, that can be the difference between being in violation of Law 11, or not.

Diagram 7:



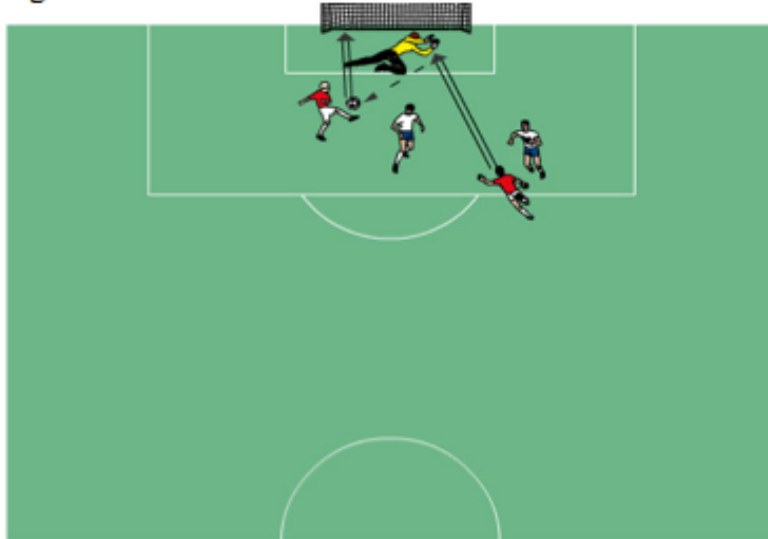
In Diagram 7, The Red attacking player labeled the “lazy forward” is in an offside position, receives the ball in an offside position, but is not in violation of the offside law. The reason being; A player in an offside position is only penalized if, at the moment the ball touches or is **played by one of his team** he is, in the opinion of the referee, involved in active play.

Diagram 8:



In Diagram 8, There is a Red attacker standing in an offside position, but he is not in violation of the offside law. **Note:** this is open to a referee’s interpretation, but since the shot is taken directly, the player in the offside position should be deemed “not interfering with the play.”

Diagram 9:



In diagram 9, the Red attacker goes from being in an offside position to violating the offside law. Once the goalkeeper gives up a rebound, the second Red attacker goes from a passive offside position to violating the offside law because he “**gains an advantage**” by being positioned in such a manner. So, despite the ball last being touched by a member of the opposing team AND being behind the ball, the Red player is still guilty of an infraction.

In Conclusion: The offside law is one of the most difficult rules to enforce for an official. It’s important to understand that, whether a player is in an offside position or not can change in a matter of seconds. Games at the highest level are often decided by forwards timing their runs or defenders mistiming an “offside trap.” At the youth level, particularly with games officiated without assistant referees, coaches and parents would be better served by acknowledging that mistakes will be made and it makes no sense to shout out claims of “Offside!”. In many instances, these claims are incorrect and even when they are correct, in the end, the referee’s opinion is the only one that matters.