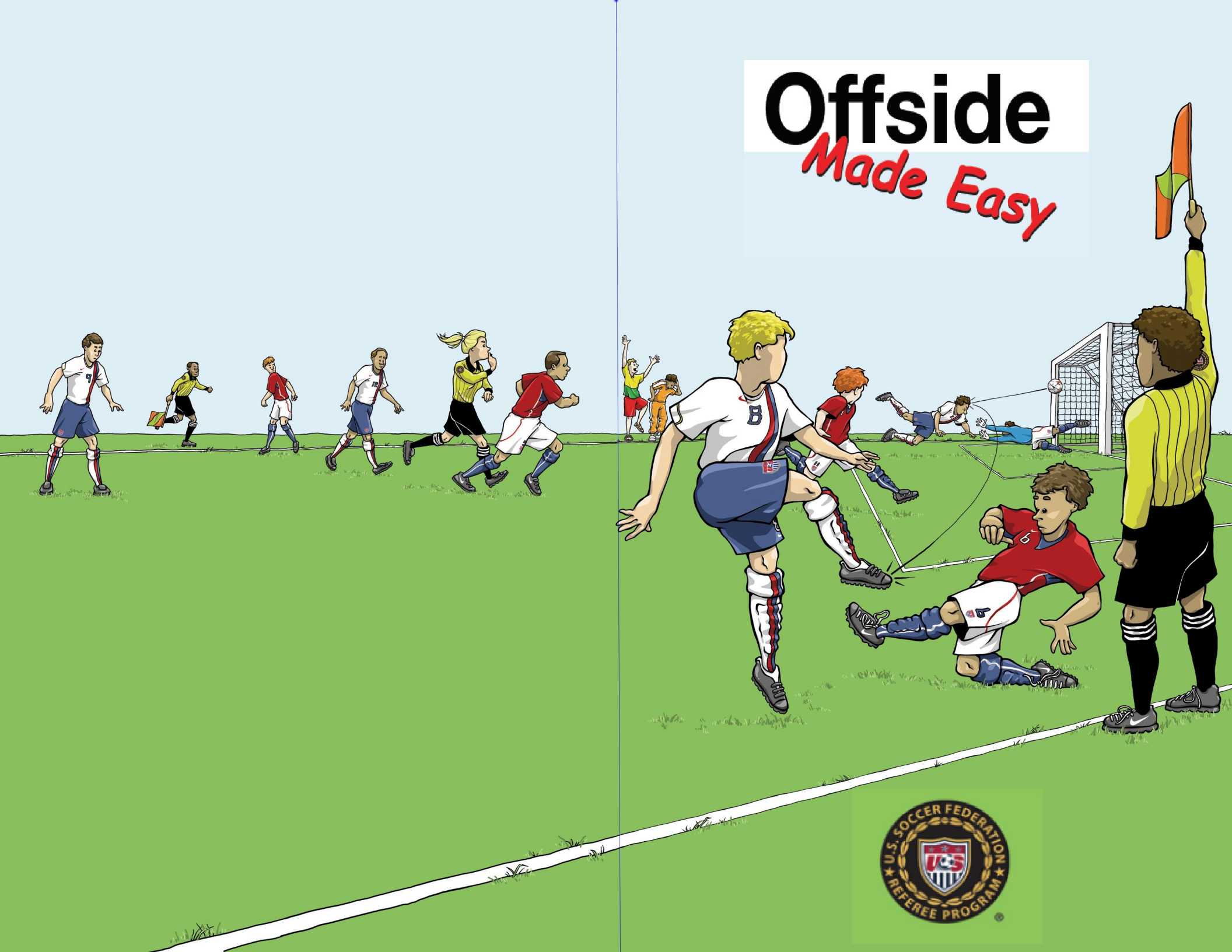


# Offside

*Made Easy*



In 2003, the United States Soccer Federation published ***The Laws of the Game Made Easy*** to launch a new program of providing educational and training materials that would interest and appeal to a wider audience. There are millions of people of all ages across the country who participate in the sport of soccer as officials, players, coaches, and spectators. They bring to the field a multitude of backgrounds, languages, cultures, and skills, and they are often intensely passionate about the game but may not know much about it.

***The Laws of the Game Made Easy*** was aimed at those participants who want to know more about the laws that govern how soccer is played but who may find the traditional way of presenting them difficult to appreciate. Soccer is fun. Learning about its laws can be entertaining, enjoyable, and maybe fun as well.

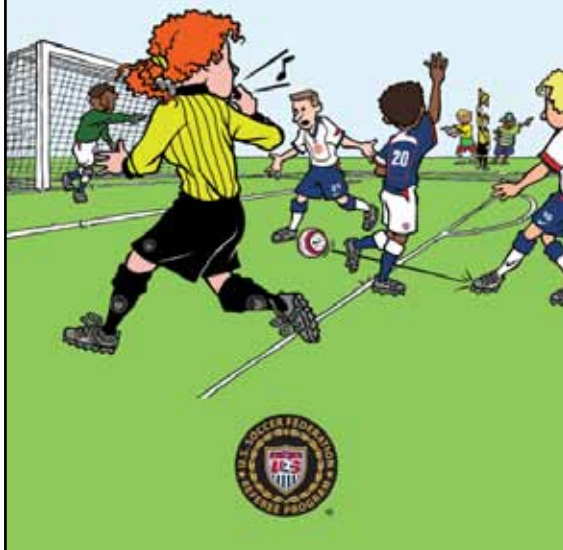
This booklet, ***Offside Made Easy***, intends to continue that theme by focusing on one of the more misunderstood areas of the law. Offside decisions may confuse people because they are not looking at the play on the field the same way as the officials have to look at it in order to make these decisions. ***Offside Made Easy*** approaches the topic by breaking the offside law into logical, easily presented parts and then uses many illustrations to demonstrate how officials enforce this law.

The development of this booklet continues the outreach efforts of USSF's national instructional program. It was written by Dan Heldman, illustrated by Colby Jones, and produced by Dick Triche. The assistance of members of the national instructional staff was particularly useful in ensuring that it was both accurate and entertaining.

Alfred Kleinaitis  
Manager of Referee Development and Education  
2011

# Offside

*Made Easy*



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Soccer is a team sport. In Britain, where the game started, a common term for team was side so offside meant "away from the team."



The idea was that a player should not just stand around the goal waiting for a teammate to send the ball to him so that he could kick it into the goal. If that was okay, then the other team would also have to keep some of their players down at their goal to protect against this.

What would be the result?

A soccer field with lots of players around the two goals instead of using all the space in between the goals wouldn't be much of a game! It would not be much fun... and it wouldn't take a lot of skill to score a goal. Just knock the ball close enough to the goal and let the player camped out down there try to kick it through the wall of defenders.

Offside has been a part of soccer from its very beginnings. One of the first attempts to write down the rules of soccer had this:

A player is considered "sneaking" when three or less than three of the opposite side are before him and the ball behind him, and in such a case, he may not kick the ball.

[Etonian Rule, 1847]

Look at what this rule called being offside "**sneaking**"!

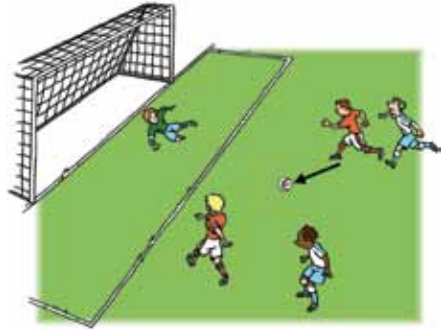
Players want to score goals using their skills, not by "sneaking"! Even though this was written more than 150 years ago, all the important parts of offside were there. The only changes to offside that have occurred in the past century have been to make it more difficult to be offside and to make it clearer what a player who is in an offside position can't do.



## OFFSIDE POSITION

A player is in an offside position if:

- the player is nearer to the opponent's goal line than both the ball and the second to the last opponent



A player is NOT in an offside position if the player:



- is in their own half of the field of play

or



- is even with the second to the last opponent

or



- is even with the last two opponents



A player can be in an offside position and not be guilty of being offside.




## OFFENSE

A player in an offside position is only penalized if, at the moment the ball touches or is played by a teammate, the player is, in the opinion of the referee, **involved in active play** by:

 interfering with play




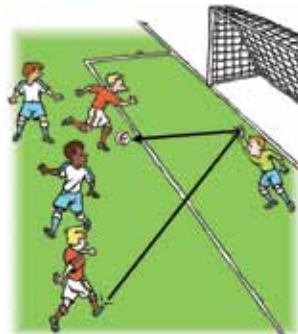
or

 interfering with an opponent



or

 gaining an advantage by being in that position



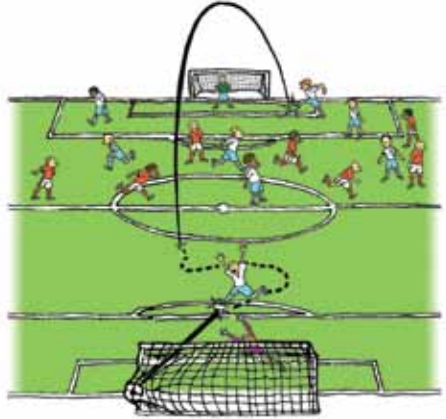


## NO OFFENSE

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



a goal kick



or



a throw-in



or



a corner kick



## SANCTIONS FOR OFFSIDE



When a player is offside, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team to be taken from the place where that player was located.\*

\* Unless the offside offense occurred inside the goal area then the restart can be taken from anywhere inside the goal area





Here are the questions a referee or assistant referee must answer when deciding if a player is offside:



Is the player in an **offside position**?



Is the player “**involved in active play**”?



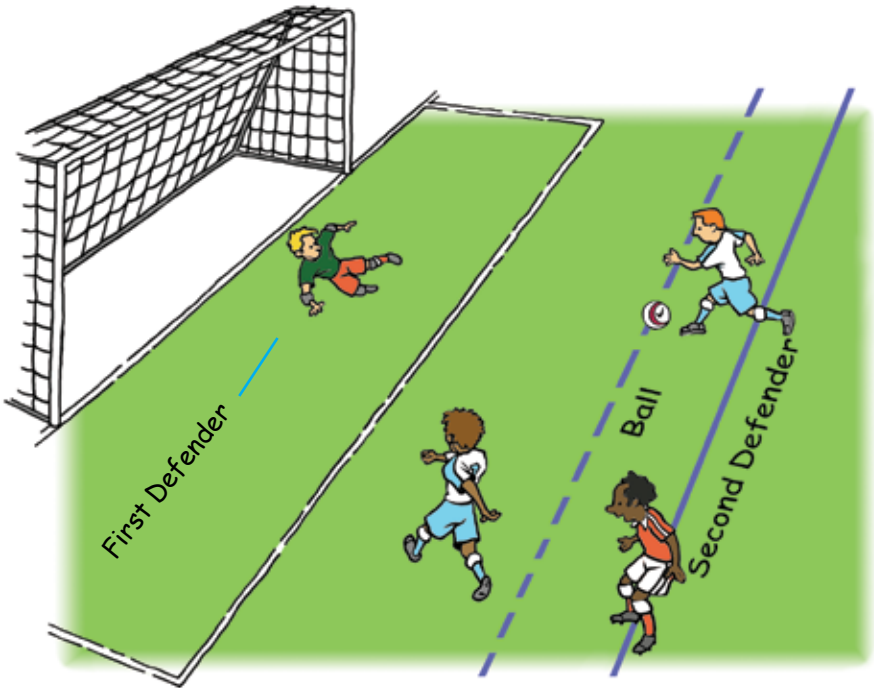
Is this situation covered by one of the **exceptions**?



What is the **restart** for being judged offside?



Where does the restart occur?





## What is an offside position?

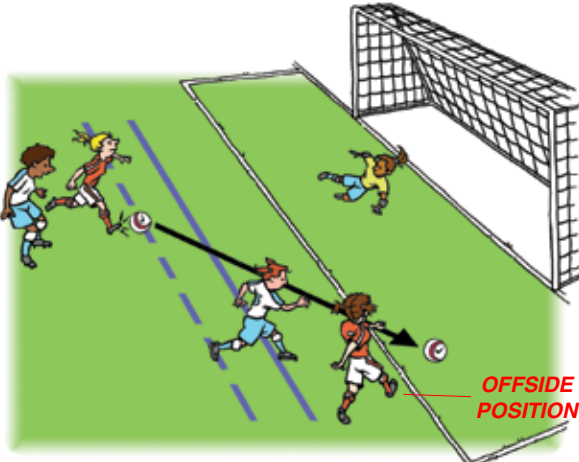
In the other team's half of the field



Nearer to the other team's goal line than the ball



Nearer to the other team's goal line than the last two opponents



"Last two opponents"

= Two players on the other team closest to their goal line (usually but not necessarily including the goalkeeper)

"Nearer to"

= the torso (body trunk) of the attacker is closer to the goal line than the torso of the defender



*Nearer*

*Not Nearer*

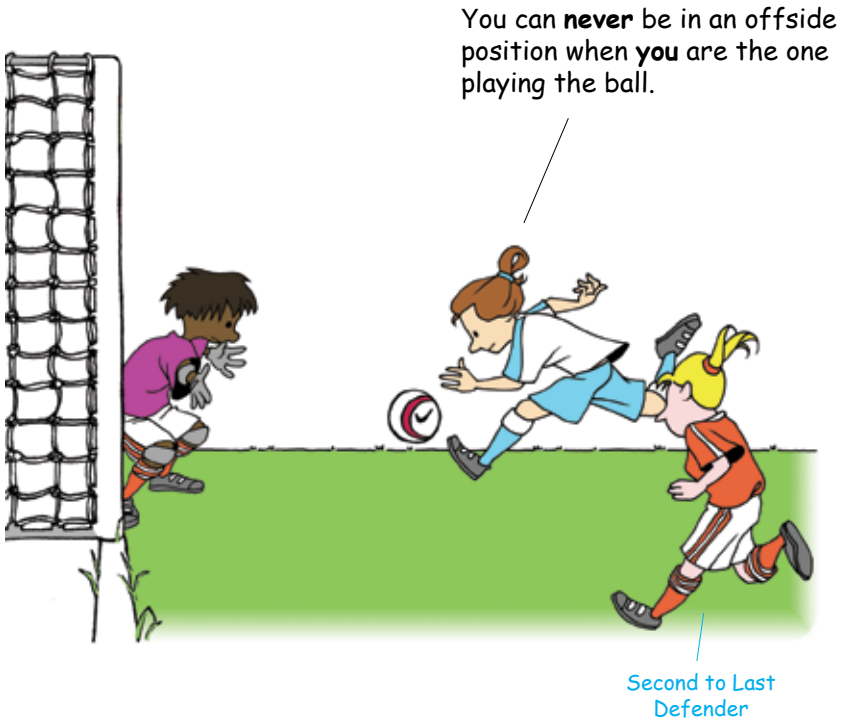


"Nearer to" simply means one torso is in front of the other.



Offside position

- Judged only when your own team has the ball
- Doesn't matter if the other team has the ball



***It is not against the law to be in an offside position!***

*This is probably the single most important thing to remember about Law 11.*

Once you are in an offside position, it stays with you no matter where anyone or anything moves -- you, the ball, teammates, defenders, **anyone!**

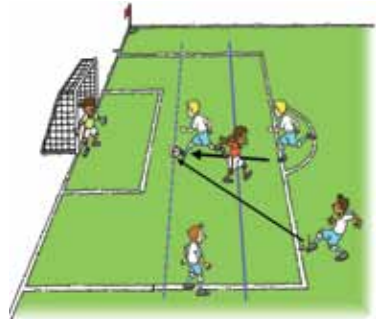
Nothing you can do on your own can put you into an onside position. Someone has to help you:

- A defender completely controls the ball (not just touches it),



or

- A teammate touches or plays the ball again and this time you aren't in an offside position when that happens,



or

- The ball leaves the field and the other team has the restart.



*A defender has to control the ball, not just touch it, to start a new play.*





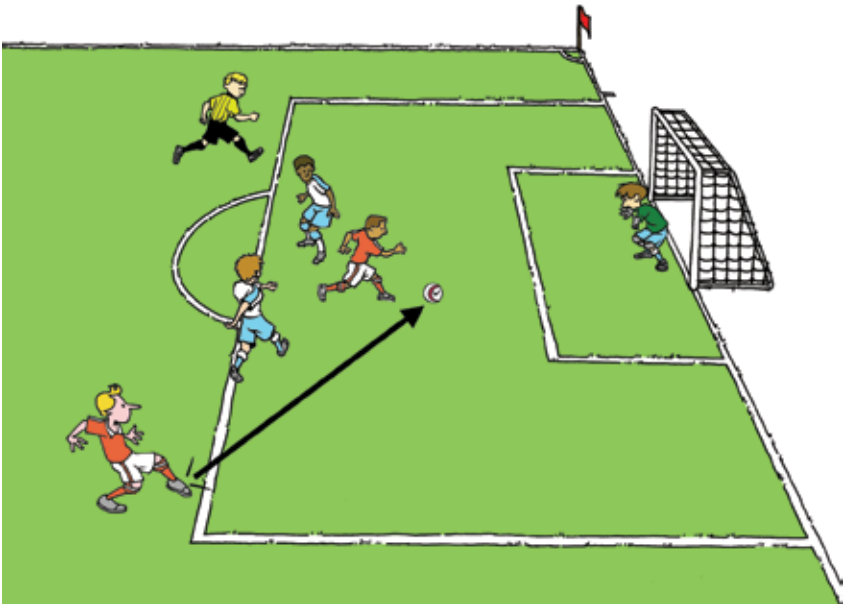
It is OK to be in an offside position... but the referee blows the whistle and calls "Offside!"

This is because what is being called is **not** the offside position by itself but the player has become "**involved in active play**" in addition to being in the offside position.

What does "involved in active play" mean?

It means:

- Interfering with play
- or
- Interfering with an opponent
- or
- Gaining an advantage

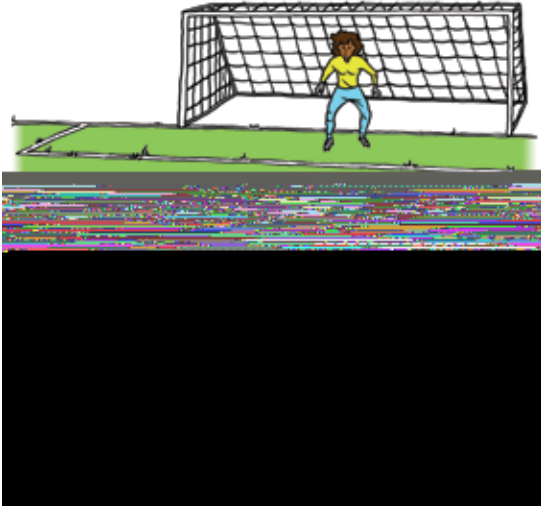


"Active play" = the area around and moving with the ball (there is no specific distance)

"Involved" = able to play the ball or to prevent an opponent from playing the ball (**does not require actually touching the ball**)



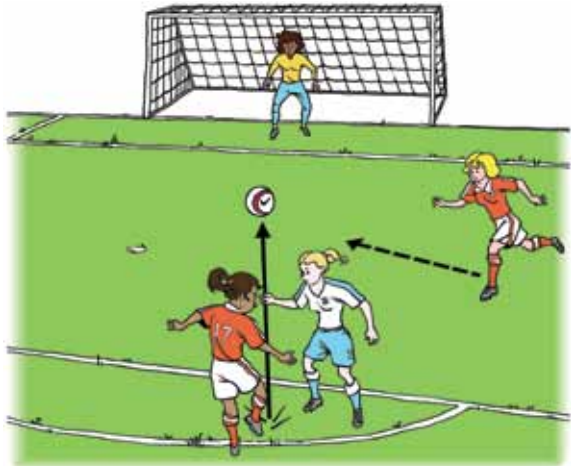
## Interfering With Play



Having the ball passed to you by a teammate (most common way)



Moving to play a ball that wasn't played directly to you (you are interfering with play when the referee decides you are going to get involved with the play).





## Interfering With An Opponent



Blocking movement or line of sight of the defending goal-keeper (most common way)

- just being near the goalkeeper is not enough to "interfere" with goalkeeper.

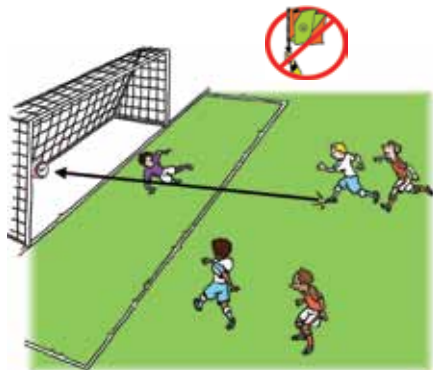


Being in the way of an opponent forcing the opponent to stop, swerve, or slow down



### REMEMBER!!!

Just being in an offside position anywhere on the field is not necessarily interfering with or distracting an opponent

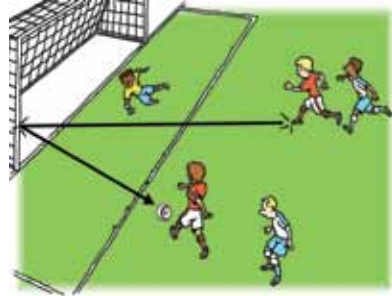




## Gaining An Advantage



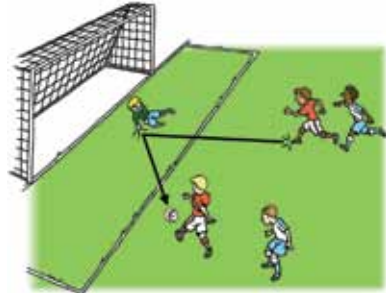
Receiving a ball deflected off the goalpost, crossbar, referee, goalkeeper, or another defender



Rebounds from goal post



Must have been in an offside position when teammate played the ball, not when the ball was deflected



Saved or punched away by goalkeeper



Gaining an advantage as an offside violation is rare and can easily be missed because everyone (except the referee!) tends to forget how the play started or because it is difficult to say when a defender **plays** the ball rather than simply deflects it.



Deflected (not completely controlled) by defender

### REMEMBER!!!

*Deflected* means that the ball was not controlled or deliberately played.







An attacker in an offside position who is in the area of active play can attempt to avoid being called for offside by:



Clearly moving out of active play (backing away, standing still or moving in the opposite direction).

*NOT Involved*



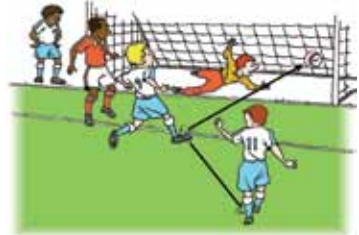
Clearly catching the referee's attention and establishing to the referee's satisfaction that the attacker will not make any attempt to play the ball.



*NOT Involved*



Stepping off the field (where, of course, the ball cannot be played).



## REMEMBER!!!



Position  
+  
Involvement = Offside



## EXCEPTIONS

An attacker in an offside position cannot be called for offside if the ball comes directly from a:



Goal kick



Corner kick



Throw-in





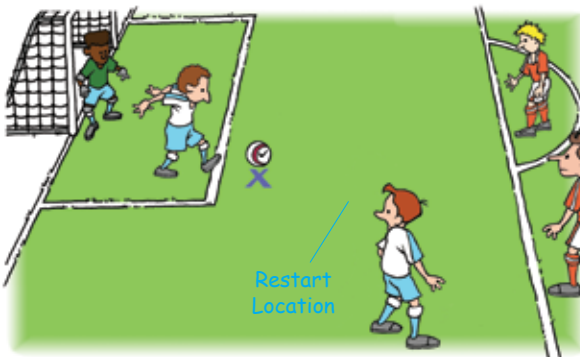
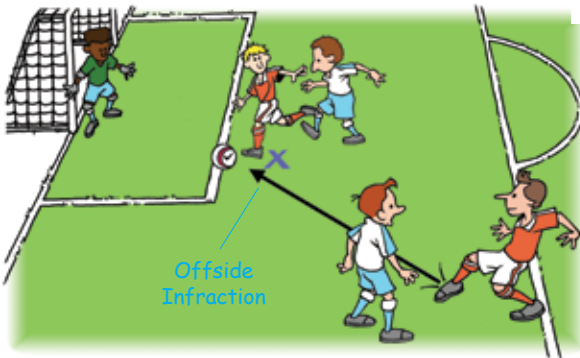
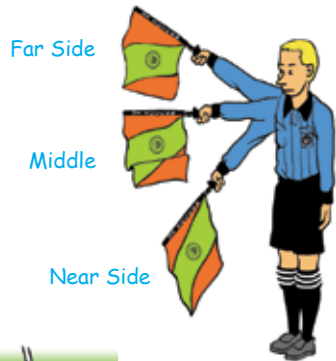
## WHAT IS THE RESTART ?



The restart is an indirect free kick for the other team.

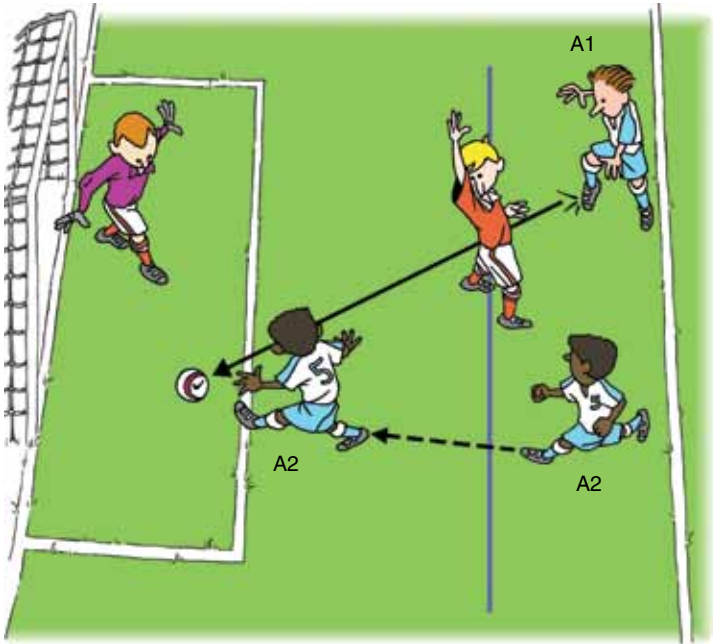
### Where?

Where the attacker was offside (except in the goal area, in which case the kick can be taken from anywhere inside the goal area)



1

An attacker got the ball several yards past our second to last defender but the referee didn't call offside. Why?



An offside position is not judged when a player "got the ball" but where the player was when the ball was played by a teammate.

This is called "coming from an onside position" and is often misunderstood because it is easy to forget where a player started from when everyone is looking at where the player is later.

A2 receives the ball behind the second to last defender but A2 was "onside" when the ball was played by A1.

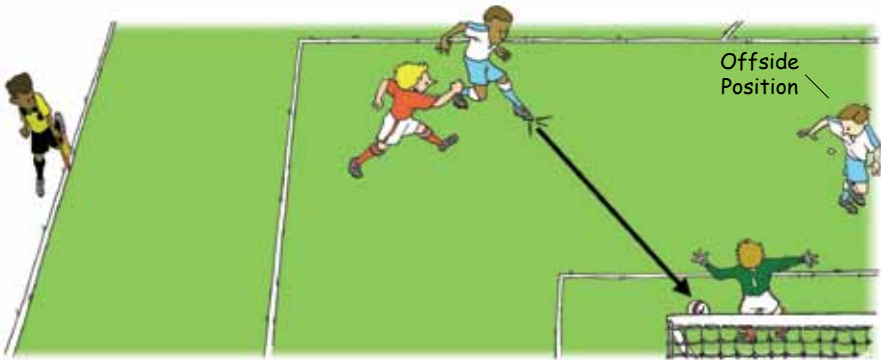
Defenders sometimes raise their arms to claim an attacker should be called offside. They are hoping to get the referee to make a decision in their favor.



2

**An attacker was clearly past the second to last defender when a teammate struck the ball directly into the net. The referee counted the goal. Why?**

Being in an offside position is not against Law 11.



**GOOOOAAAL!!!!!!**

If the player in the offside position did not:

- interfere with play
- interfere with an opponent
- gain an advantage by being in that position



The player is not penalized for offside !



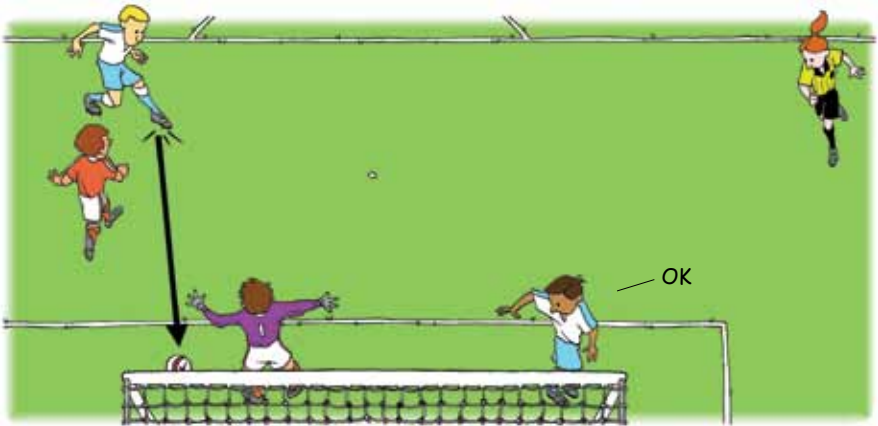
## REMEMBER!!!

An offside position by itself is not enough to distract an opponent.



3

**The attacker was right down at the goal line near the side of the net. Didn't that interfere with the goalkeeper? Isn't an attacker that close to the goal automatically interfering with play?**



**GOOOOAAAL!!!!!!**



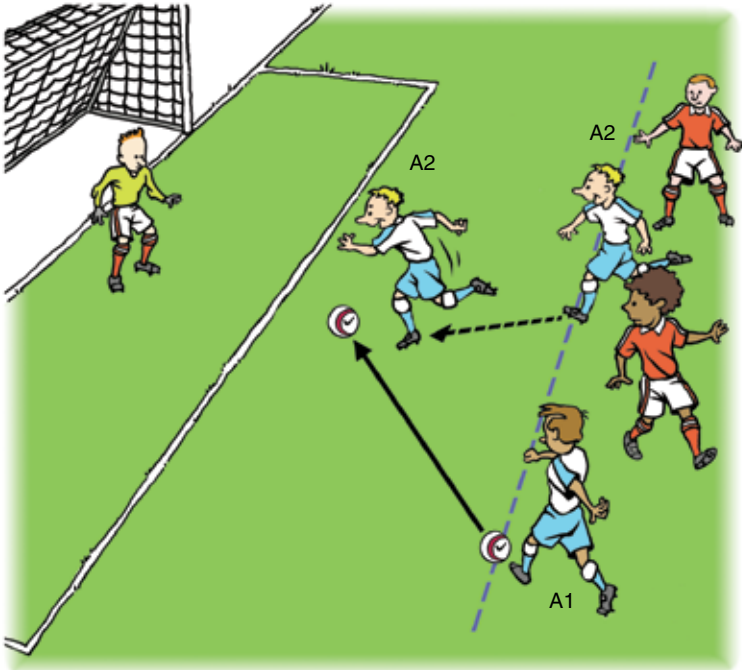
The attacker is not interfering with the goalkeeper unless the attacker:

- blocks the goalkeeper's view of play
- is in the path of the goalkeeper
- says or does something specifically to distract the goalkeeper

4

**Player A1 is attacking with no defenders in front of him except the goalkeeper. Teammate A2 is following behind him. What if player A1 plays the ball and his teammate runs up to take possession?**

**Is this offside?**



If player A2 is behind, or even with, the ball when player A1 last touched the ball, there is no offside position and therefore no offside violation.



A2 was not nearer the goal line than the ball when the ball was played by A1.

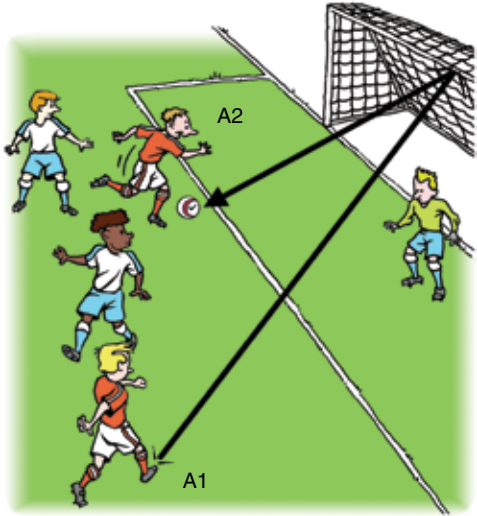
5

## Player A1 shoots on goal and the ball bounces back from the crossbar to A2?

Player A2 was in an offside position when A1 played the ball.



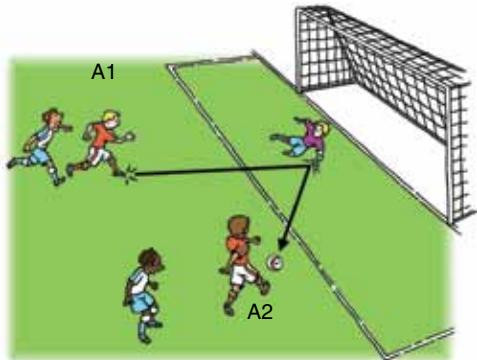
The ball bounced back from the crossbar to A2. A2 is called for offside for being "involved in active play" by "gaining an advantage."



## Player A1 shoots on goal and the ball bounces back from the goalkeeper to A2?



A2 is called for offside for being "involved in active play" by "gaining an advantage." The ball rebounded from the goalkeeper.



In either case, if A1's original shot had gone into the net...

# GOOOOAAAL!!







6

**You say that an attacker must have played the ball before a teammate in an offside position can be called for offside. What does “play the ball” mean here?**

Law 11 refers to the ball being touched or played by a teammate.

There are a number of ways a player can “touch” or “play” the ball. A few may be:

- Kick the ball



- Head the ball



- Chest trap



- Stop the ball with a foot



“Play the ball” for an **attacker** means **any** contact by the player with the ball - even accidental or unintended contact.





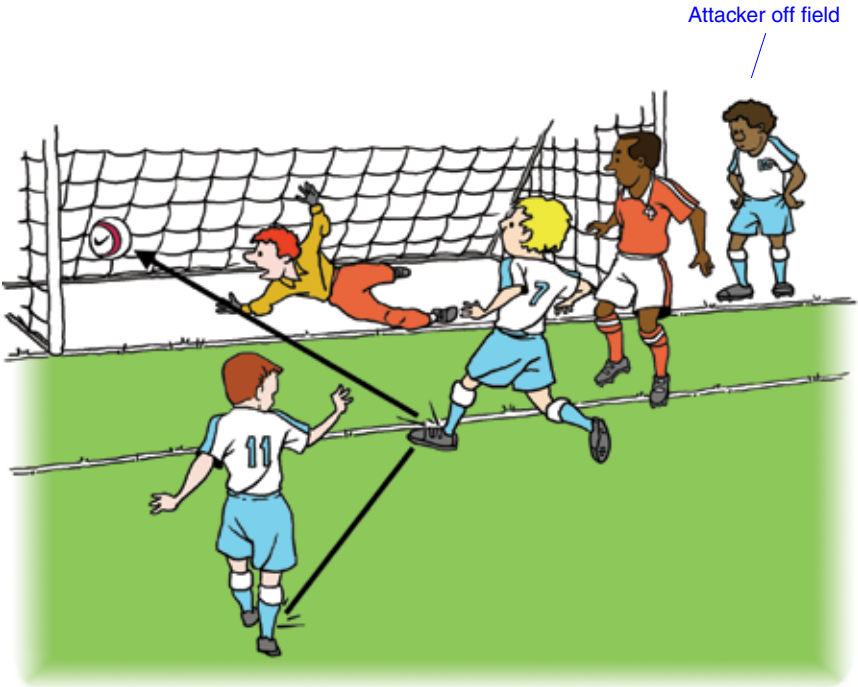
7

**Can an attacker step off the field to show that he is not participating in play?**

YES



This is one of several ways an attacker can show they are not involved in active play. It is legal and the attacker doesn't need the referee's permission either to leave the field or to return it is considered "normal play."

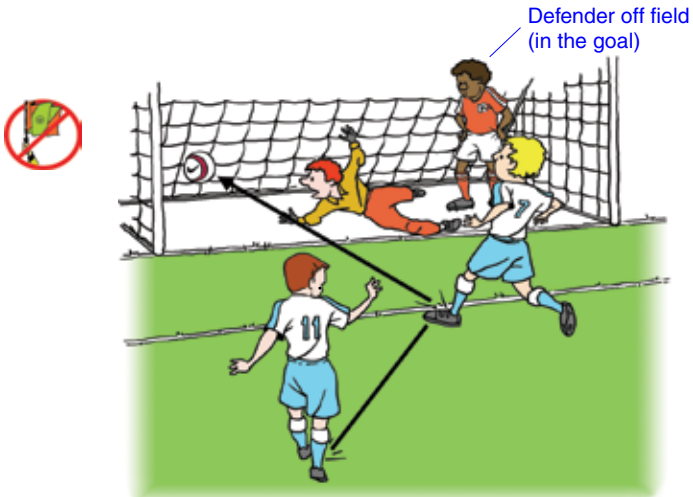
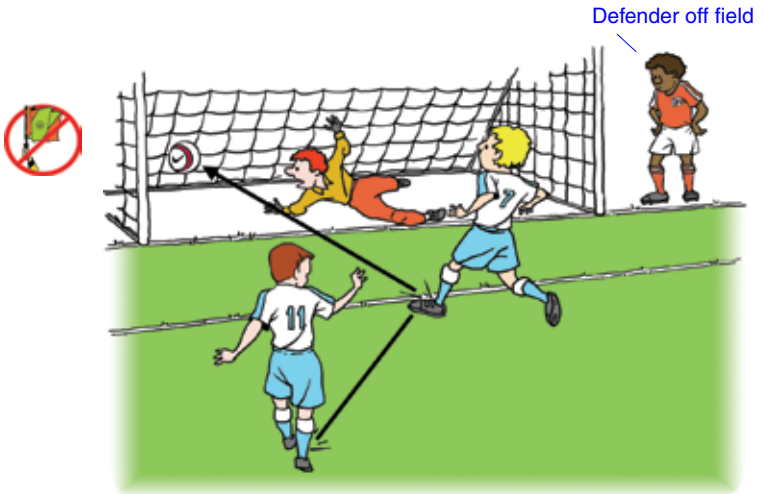


8

## Can a defender step off the field to put an attacker in an offside position?

NO

This defender is counted as one of the last two defenders, even though he is off the field. Attacker #7 has two defenders in front of him. He is not in an offside position.



Not only does this not work (the referee would still count the defender in determining offside position), but the defender is committing misconduct and could be cautioned.

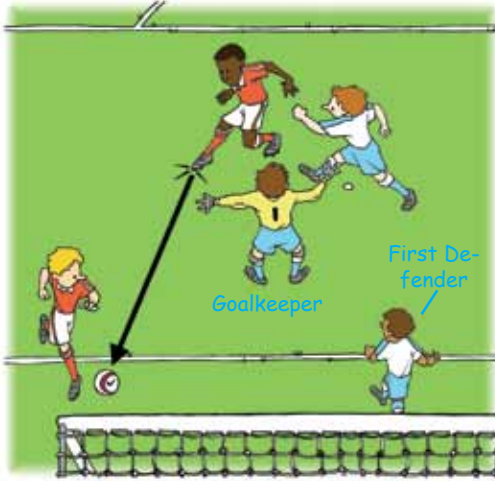


9

**Does the 1st or 2nd defender have to be the goalkeeper?**

NO

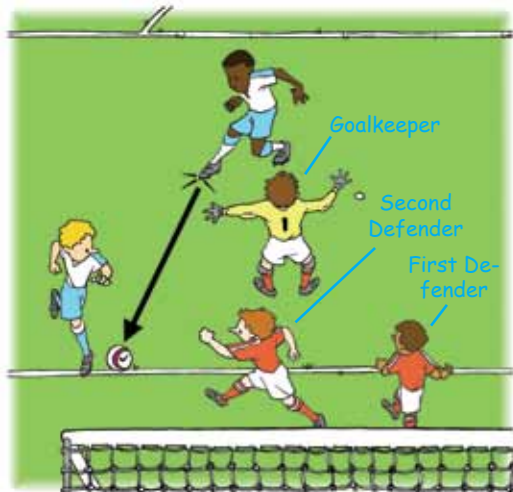
All defenders are counted in figuring out who the second to last defender is.



The goalkeeper moves to challenge for the ball and a defender steps back to protect the goal. The goalkeeper becomes the second to last defender.



There are two defenders between the attacker and the goal, neither of whom is the goalkeeper.



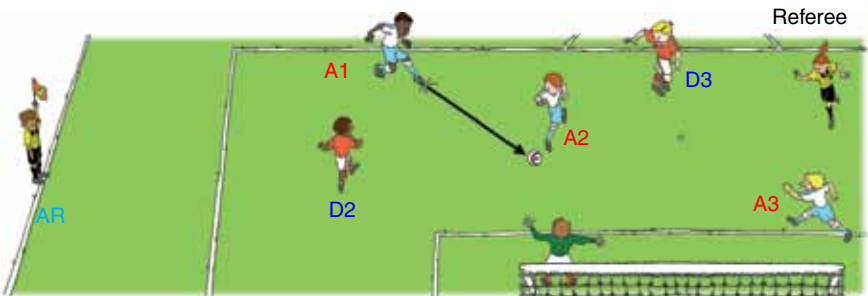


10

**The AR called offside but the referee waved the flag down. Can the referee do that?**

YES

- The assistant referee does not "call" offside.
- The assistant referee is in the best position to judge who is in an offside position.
- The assistant referee's flag is a signal that an attacker is in an offside position and might be involved in active play.
- Active play, however, is often closer to the referee than to the assistant referee.
- The referee is therefore usually in a better position to judge involvement.



- The referee always makes the final decision about calling offside.

## 11

### Can a player be offside on a dropped ball?

NO

- Offside position is judged only when the ball is touched or played by a teammate.
- It is the referee who last touches the ball on a dropped ball restart so no one can be in an offside position at that moment.
- But, once the ball hits the ground, it is possible to be called offside if it is your teammate, who takes part in the dropped ball, then plays the ball to you.



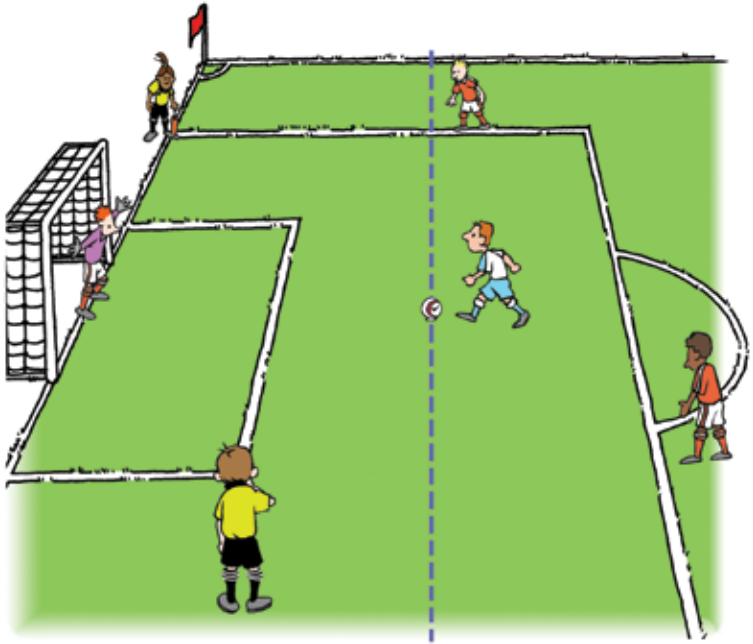
- If attacker #11 kicks the ball when it hits the ground, her teammate will be in an offside position!

12

Can you be offside on a penalty kick?

NO

- One of the rules for the penalty kick is that, except for the goalkeeper, all players have to be behind the ball when the referee gives the signal for the kick to occur.



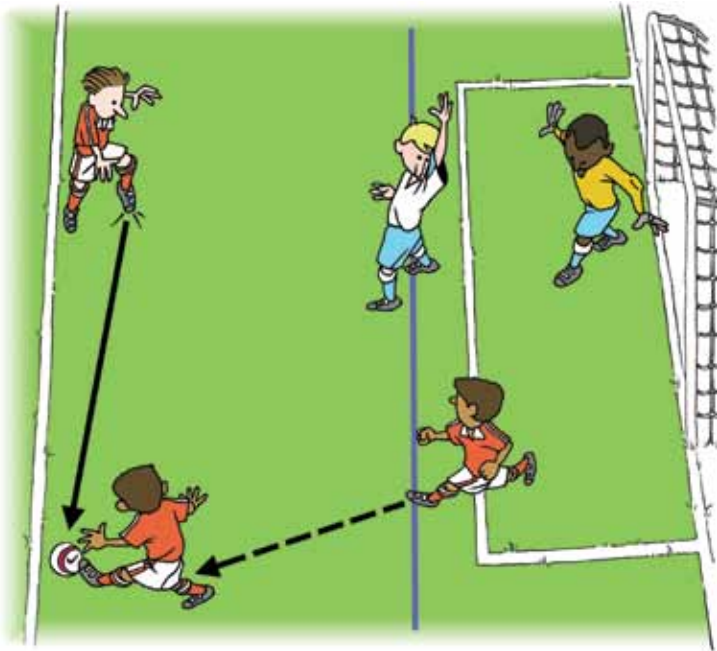
- The referee will not signal for the penalty kick if anyone other than the goalkeeper is ahead of the ball.
- Once the ball is kicked, it is in play and the offside Law applies.



13

The referee called my player for offside even though he was way behind the second to last defender when he got the ball. How can that be?

- It isn't important where an attacker gets the ball, it's where the attacker was when a teammate last played the ball



This player was in an offside position when the ball was played and "came back" to get the ball



Coaches, players, and spectators tend to focus on the immediate area of play, but the referee and assistant referee have to remember where a player was when the play started.



14

Can an attacker do anything to avoid being called offside other than stepping off the field?

YES

- Move away from the area of active play
- Turn away
- Make eye contact with the referee and stand still
- Do anything that clearly indicates that you are not involved in the play

But

- The action has to be clear and concrete
- It has to be seen and recognized by the referee



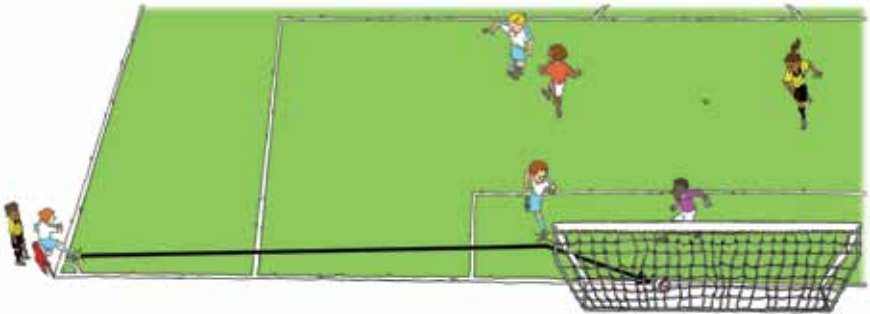


15

Corner kicks are an exception in calling offside.  
But I've seen offside called on corner kicks. Why?



The exception applies only if the ball is received directly from the corner kick.



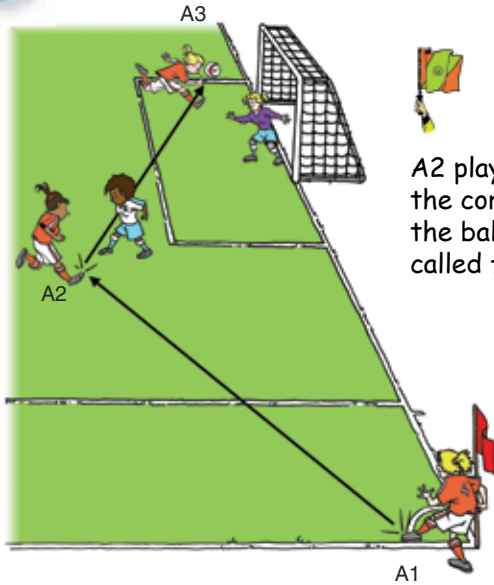
Once another attacker touches or plays the ball after a corner kick, it is no longer "directly" and the offside rules apply as usual.



"Directly" in soccer means no one else touched or played the ball.



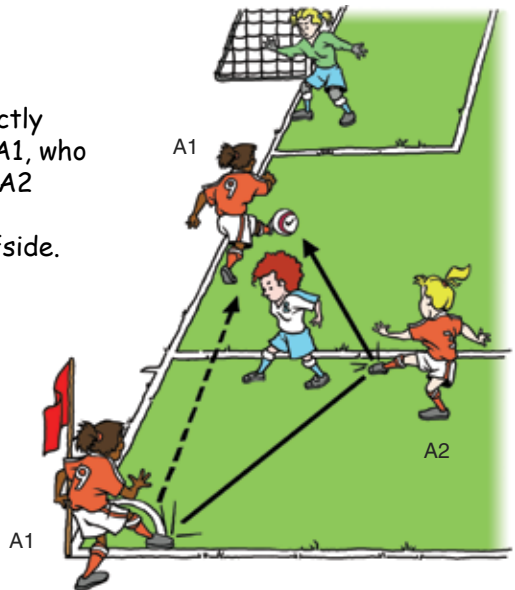
15 continued



A2 plays the ball directly from the corner kick. A3 receives the ball from A2. A3 must be called for offside.



A2 receives the ball directly from the corner kick by A1, who then runs into the field. A2 plays the ball back to A1. A1 must be called for offside.





Being in an offside position is not against the Law



Offside position depends on where the attacker is at the time a teammate plays the ball

- Ahead of the ball
- Ahead of the second to last defender
- In the other team's half of the field

Not when or where the attacker gets the ball !



Even if in an offside position, an attacker cannot be called offside if the ball is received **directly** from a:

- Goal Kick
- Corner Kick
- Throw In



Offside is called **only** if, when in an offside position, an attacker becomes involved in play by:

- Interfering with play (for example, having the ball passed to you or running to the ball)
- Interfering with an opponent (for example, blocking a player on the other team)
- Gaining an advantage (for example, getting a ball that bounces off a crossbar)



"Involvement in active play" is based on the opinion of the referee



An attacker in an offside position can become "onside" only if:

- The ball leaves the field,
- A teammate touches or plays the ball again, or
- A defender plays (controls) the ball

