



# Referee Guidance

## 2025 North American Sand Soccer Championships

The following have been specifically adapted for the North American Sand Soccer Championships rules of competition. It is meant to serve as a reference to highlight the unique differences between soccer and sand soccer and to clarify the key points that most referees will encounter on most matches to gain greater consistency in how the local matches are officiated.

### PERIODS

- Three 11-minute periods (12-minutes for US OPEN)
- Two minutes between each period

### COIN TOSSES

- **Before the match** - Winner of toss chooses ball or end
- **Between 2nd and 3rd periods** - Winner of toss chooses ball or end
- **Prior to penalty kicks** - Referee decides which goal is best to use. Winner of toss chooses to kick first or second

### SAND MOUND

- Built using the feet or ball (no hands) to elevate the ball for **any** kick
- 4-second count begins once mound is complete and the player stands up

### KICK-OFF

- No 4-second count
- Opponents retreat at least 5 yards from the ball until kicked
- Cannot score directly from a kick-off (Violation = goal clearance for opponent)
- Minimum of 3 players per team for all games
- U8-10 games are 6 vs 6. All other games are 5 vs 5

## KICK-IN & THROW-IN

- 4-second count begins once the player is in position  
*(Restart = kick-in/throw in for opponent)*
- Opponents remain **5 yards** away until kick-in/throw-in is taken
- No whistle required, unless kick-in/throw-in is delayed to waste time, including if one player starts to take the kick-in/throw-in and leaves the ball for a teammate to take it instead  
*(Referee blows the whistle and visibly starts the 4-second count, even if player isn't ready)*
- If ball doesn't enter field  
*(Restart = kick-in/throw in for opponent)*
- Cannot score directly from a kick-in/throw-in  
*(Violation = goal clearance for opponent if ball directly enters opponents' goal)*  
*(Violation = corner kick for opponent if ball directly enters player's own goal)*
- Keeper in their own penalty area may receive the kick-in/throw-in with their hands/arms from **either** team
- Keeper taking a kick-in or throw-in **is permitted** to use their **hands/arms** to receive the ball from a team-mate. However, they are **not permitted** to use their **hands/arms** to receive the ball a second time from a team-mate until an opponent touches the ball  
*(Violation = free kick for opponent with a clear zone (cone) at midfield)*

## CORNER KICK

- 4-second count *(Violation = goal-clearance for opponent)*
- Opponents remain **5 yards** away from the imaginary corner arc until ball is kicked
- No whistle required, unless Corner is delayed to waste time  
*(Referee blows the whistle and visibly start the 4-second count)*

## PENALTY KICK

- **NO** 4-second count
- Same procedures as soccer with the following modifications:
  1. All players, except the keeper, must be outside the penalty area and at least **5 yards** from the imaginary penalty spot
  2. **The player who was fouled must take the kick**  
(If they are injured and must leave the field, their **substitute** will kick for them)
  3. If the offense was a **handball**, the penalty kick may be taken by **any** player or substitute of the team taking the kick
  4. Penalty area is between the goal line and an imaginary parallel line at a distance of 10 yds from the goal line on large fields, and (9 yds) on small fields. The imaginary penalty mark is in the center of the imaginary penalty-area line

## DROPPED BALL

- Both teams, except kicker, must remain at least **2 yards** from the ball until it touches the sand
- Dropped ball must touch at least two players before entering the goal

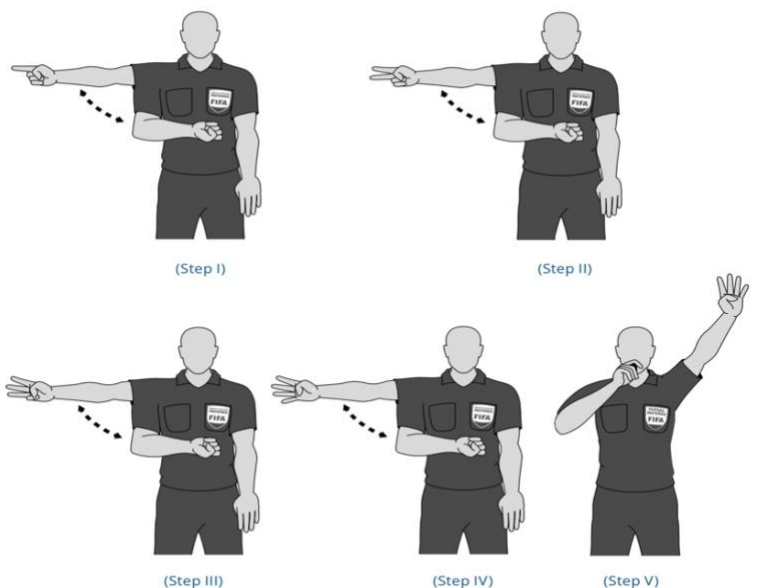
## GOAL CLEARANCE

- **Keeper has 4 seconds to throw/release the ball from inside the penalty area.**
  - The ball does **not** have to leave the penalty area upon the keeper's release, but if it doesn't, a **new** 4-second count is required until the ball is played out of the penalty area by the keeper's teammate.  
*(Violation = free kick for opponent with a clear zone (cone) at midfield)*
  - If keeper takes a goal clearance using the foot, warn the keeper that they can only use hands/arms and retake the goal clearance. The 4-second count continues from the point where play was stopped once the keeper is positioned to retake the goal clearance  
*(Violation = free kick for opponent with a clear zone (cone) at midfield)*
  - The keeper may not touch the ball a second time if they didn't throw or release it out of the penalty area for a goal clearance  
*(Violation = free kick for opponent with a clear zone (cone) at midfield)*
  - If ball is thrown/released at goal clearance **directly** into the keeper's **own** goal  
*(Restart = corner kick for the opponent)*
  - If ball is thrown/released at goal clearance **directly** into **opponent's** goal  
*(Restart = goal clearance for the opponent)*
  - If ball is thrown/released, and after touching a team-mate, enters the keepers **own** goal  
*(Restart = kick-off (goal is allowed))*
  - After a **goal clearance**, the keeper is **permitted** to use their **hands/arms** to receive the ball from a team-mate. However, they are **not permitted** to use their **hands/arms** a second time to receive the ball from a team-mate until an opponent touches the ball  
*(Violation = free kick for opponent with a clear zone (cone) at midfield)*
- **Opponents must leave and remain outside the penalty area until the ball is thrown/released. If opponent didn't have time to leave the penalty area, and the keeper chooses to take the goal clearance, the referee allows play to continue.**

## 4-SECOND COUNT

- **All restarts require a visible 4-second count, except Kick-offs and Penalty Kicks**

If a restart is delayed to waste time, the referee blows the whistle and visibly starts the 4-second count



### **Referee MUST visibly perform the 4-second count for the following:**

- **Goal Clearance**

Count begins when keeper is in possession of the ball in the penalty area. The ball does **not** have to leave the penalty area upon the keeper's release, but if it doesn't, a **new** 4-second count is required until the ball is played out of the penalty area by the keeper's teammate.

*(Violation = free kick for opponent with a clear zone (cone) at midfield)*

- **Team is in possession of the ball at any time during play in their own penalty area**

*(Violation = free kick for opponent with clear zone (cone) at midfield)*

- **Keeper is in possession of the ball at any time during play in their own penalty area**

*(Violation = free kick for opponent with clear zone (cone) at midfield)*

- **During Free kicks**

4-second count begins after the **required whistle**

*(Violation = free kick for defending team with clear zone (cone) at spot of violation if spot is in defending team's half, **OR** free kick for defending team with clear zone (cone) at midfield if spot of violation was in kicking team's half)*

If a free kick taken by defending team inside its own penalty area is not kicked **directly** out of this area, the kick is retaken, but the 4-second count is not reset and continues once the player is ready to take it

*(Violation = free kick for opponent with clear zone (cone) at midfield)*

- **Kick-in/Throw-in**

4-second count begins once the player is ready to take it

*(Violation = kick-in/throw in for opponent)*

- **Corner kick**

4-second count begins once the player is ready to take it

*(Violation = goal clearance for opponent)*

## SUBSTITUTIONS

**Discuss substitution process with both teams before each match.**

**Try to work with them without issuing cards.**

- When issuing a yellow card for improper substitution:
  - 1) A **PLAYER** must be shown a yellow card while **ON** the field  
(If a **PLAYER** receives their second yellow, their team plays down a player)
  - 2) A **SUBSTITUTE** must be shown a yellow card while **OFF** the field  
(If a **SUBSTITUTE**, receives their second yellow, their team **does not** play down a player)

### **Substitution zone:**

- Zone is 5 yards wide straddling midfield between the benches. (2 ½ yards on either side of midfield)
- **PLAYERS** must leave the field within the substitution zone
- **SUBSTITUTES** must enter the field in the substitution zone and only after the **PLAYER** being replaced has completely left the field within the substitution zone
- If a **SUBSTITUTE**, during a substitution:
  - Enters the field before the player being replaced has left, or enters the field from a place other than the substitution zone  
The referee stops play (although not immediately if they can apply advantage)  
(The referee will order the **SUBSTITUTE** to leave the field, and once the substitute is off the field, the referee will caution the substitute for the improper substitution and then allow a proper substitution)
- If a **PLAYER**, during a substitution
  - Exits the field from a place other than the substitution zone  
The referee stops play (although not immediately if they can apply advantage)  
The referee will order the **PLAYER** back onto the field, and once the player is on the field, the referee will caution the player for the improper substitution and then allow a proper substitution
- If the referee stops play for an improper substitution
  - Play is restarted with a free kick to the opposing team  
to be taken from the position of the ball at the time of the stoppage, if the ball was in the half of the team against which the offense was committed (Clear Zone Cone) or from the center of midfield with a Clear Zone (Cone) if the ball was in the half of the team that committed the offense
- **KEEPER CHANGE**
  - Any **SUBSTITUTE** may change places without informing the referee or waiting for a stoppage in play
  - Any **PLAYER** may change places with the goalkeeper, but they must do so during a stoppage in play **and** inform the referee **before** making the change  
(Violation = at next stoppage of play both players are cautioned)

## **BICYCLE AND SCISSOR KICKS**

- A player is considered to be in possession of the ball, for the purposes of a scissor kick or overhead kick (bicycle), when after controlling it with any part of the body (except the hands or arms), the ball remains in the air and in close proximity to the player, either in front or on either side of them.
- If the ball is in the possession of the player who is executing or intends to execute a scissors kick or an overhead kick (bicycle), and an opponent touches them or the ball, or otherwise interferes, a free kick at the spot of the offense or a penalty kick is awarded to the player that was attempting the scissor or bicycle kick.
- If when a ball is passed in the air, and there is an attempt to scissor or bicycle on the volley, the player **IS NOT** considered to have control and may be challenged for the ball.

## **SLIDING/SLIDE TACKLING -(NASSC)**

- Player may **NOT** slide tackle **AT** the ball
- Player may **NOT** slide tackle **AT** an opponent
- Player may slide **IN FRONT** of the ball and into its intended path to block a shot or pass.
- Player may slide to save a ball from going out of play or to attempt a shot on goal only if no defenders are close
- Whether or not a player makes contact with an opponent while performing a slide tackle, a free kick is awarded at the spot of the offense. (Caution if reckless. Send-off if excessive)

## **ADVANTAGE**

### **ADVANTAGE IS NOT RECOMMENDED UNLESS:**

- There is a **clear** goal-scoring opportunity  
(i.e., the ball going into the goal, or an attacker has the ball with no defenders between them and the goal)
- At Corner Kick with the opponent less than 5 yards away and the kicker wishes to take the kick quickly

**A free kick is considered the advantage as it gives the fouled player a clear zone with only the keeper to defend.**

**CALL THE FOUL.  
CALL THE FOUL.  
CALL THE FOUL.**

## RED CARDS-

### **Report Red Cards to Tent Coordinator and Referee Advisor after your match**

- If a **PLAYER** receives a **Red Card**:
  - They must be sent off
  - Sent-off player may no longer take part in the match or their next match
  - Referee **must** write a report for any red card **not** a result of receiving a second yellow card
  - Team plays down a player with a time penalty of either:
    - **2-MINUTES** for a **Red Card** after receiving a **second yellow card**
    - **10-MINUTES** for any straight **Red Card**

#### TIME PENALTY RULES

- After time penalty has elapsed, the team may replace the sent-off player
  - Time penalty carries into the next period as needed
  - If team playing down a player is scored against, time penalty ends, and the team may replace the sent-off player
  - If the team playing down a player scores, the time penalty continues
- If a **SUBSTITUTE** receives a **Red Card**:
    - They must be sent off
    - Sent-off player may no longer take part in the match or their next match
    - Referee **must** write a report for any red card **not** a result of receiving a second yellow card
    - Team does **NOT** play down a player
    - **NO** time penalty for a **SUBSTITUTE** receiving a red card

## YELLOW CARDS

- **No time penalty** for yellow cards

## QUARTER, SEMI, AND FINALS-

- One 3-minute extra-time will be golden goal. (NASSC)
- Penalty kicks if still tied after 3-minute extra-time
- If co-ed, at least 2 women must be in first round of kicks from each team
- Any 5 eligible kickers from each team
- Teams must reduce to equate number of players taking kicks
- All eligible kickers must kick before repeating
- After first 5 kickers the kicks are one-for-one until one team scores, and the other team doesn't score

## CO-ED TEAMS

- Minimum of 2 female players must always be on the field
- If only 1 female is available due to injury, the team plays down 1 player
- If there are no females available, the team plays down 2 players

## **FREE KICK TYPES AND PROCEDURES**

- **The player who was fouled must take the free kick**

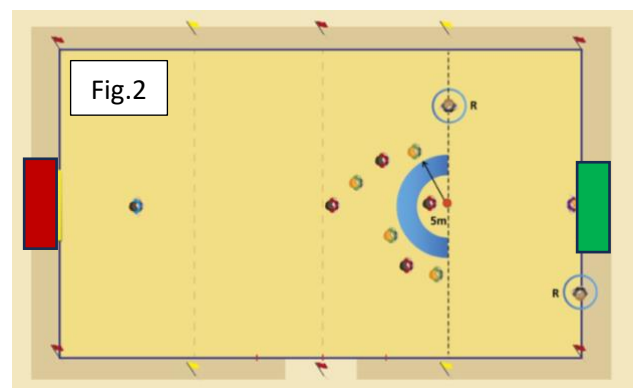
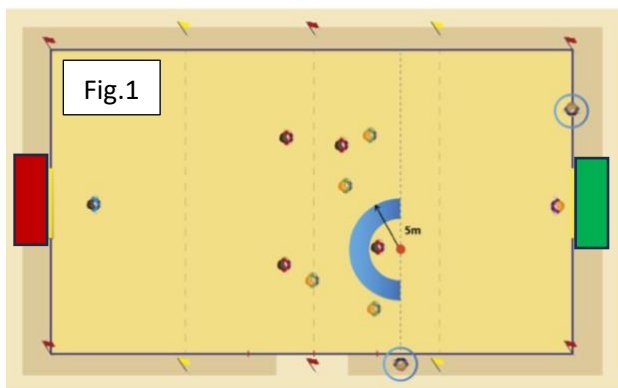
(If they are injured and must leave the field, their substitute kicks for them)

- All free kicks are **direct**
- All free kicks **require a whistle** and a **visible 4-second count**
- **NO** defensive walls
- The goalkeeper is the only player allowed in any clear zone until the ball is kicked and clearly moves
- The referee must signal which type of clear zone

- All Free Kicks require one of two types of "CLEAR ZONES":

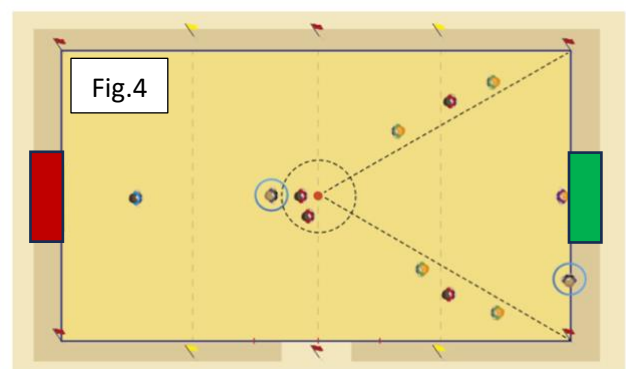
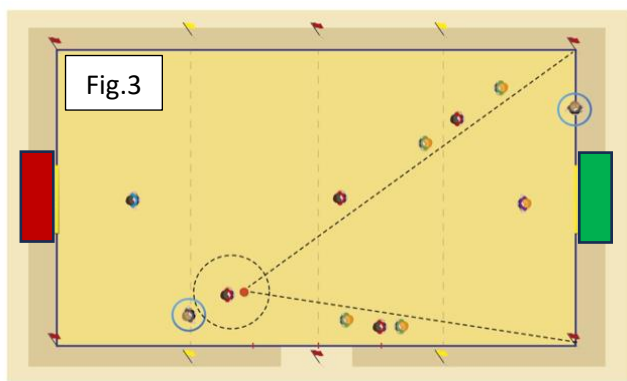
1. **CLEAR ZONE (No Cone)-**

If an offense occurs in the attacking half of the team taking a free kick (fig.1) or for a team taking a penalty kick (fig. 2), players from both teams must be positioned at least 5 yards away, and behind or even with the ball until it is kicked and clearly moves.



2. **CLEAR ZONE (Cone)-**

If an offense occurs in the defensive half of the team taking a free kick, a clear zone is established from the spot of the offense to each of the opponent's corner flags (fig.3). For all offenses that require a free kick taken at the center of midfield, a clear zone is established from the center of midfield to each of the opponent's corner flags (fig.4)

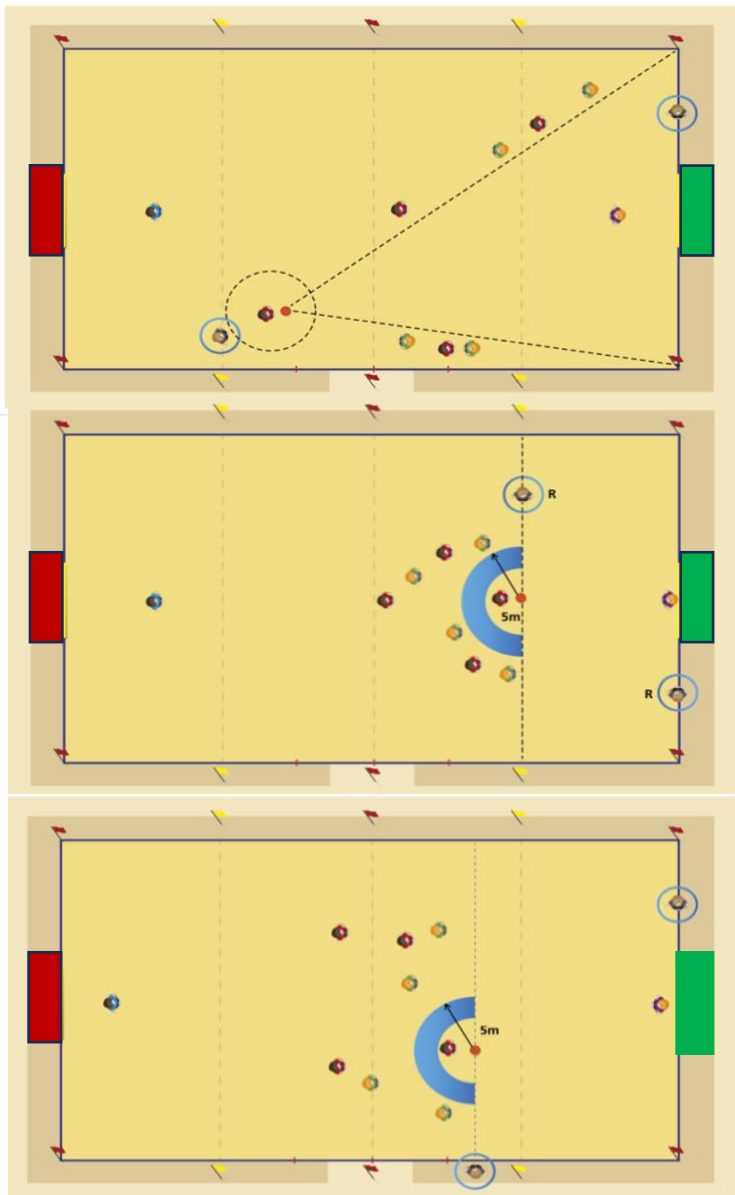




# Offenses committed anywhere on the field

**Clear Zone (Cone) behind midfield, Clear Zone (No Cone) past midfield, or Penalty Kick**

- Kicks or attempts to kick an opponent
- Trips an opponent
- Jumps at an opponent
- Charges an opponent
- Strikes or attempts to strike an opponent
- Pushes an opponent
- Tackles an opponent
- Holds an opponent
- Interferes with a scissors or bicycle kick
- Spits or deliberately throws sand at an opponent
- Handles the ball deliberately
- Slide tackles with or without contact (NAASC)



In this example, the red player was tripped by a green player in the red player's half. The restart is a free kick for red with a clear zone (cone) at the spot of the foul.

In this example, the red player was pushed in the green team's penalty area. The restart is a penalty kick for red.

In this example, the red player was tripped in the green team's half. The restart is a free kick with a clear zone (no cone) for red at the spot of the foul.

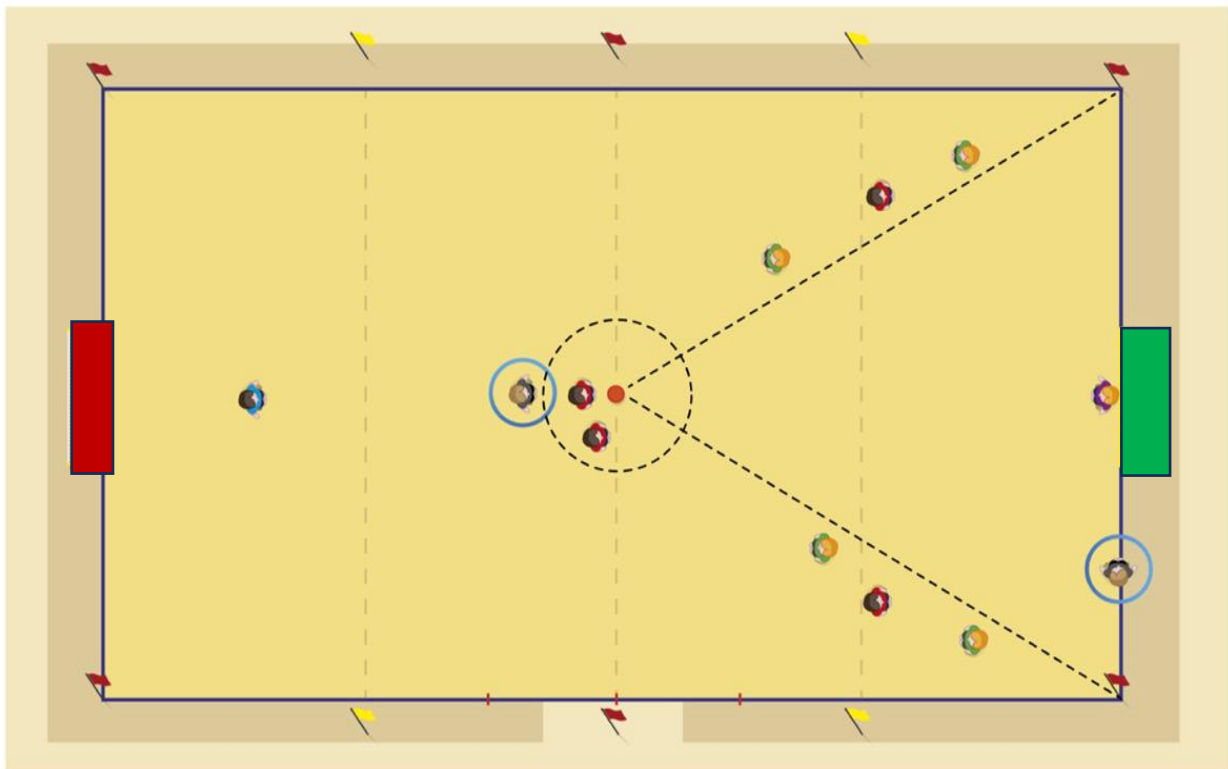
# Offenses committed by defending team in their own half

## Clear Zone (Cone) at midfield

- Team possesses the ball in own penalty area more than 4-seconds
- Keeper possesses the ball in own penalty area more than 4-seconds
- **(US OPEN ONLY)** Keeper controls ball in own half more than 4-seconds
- Keeper plays ball with hand/arm inside their penalty area after receiving it from a team-mate, then deliberately touches it again with the hand/arm after receiving a second pass from a team-mate, without the ball touching an opponent in between the two passes
- Keeper deliberately touches ball with hand/arm inside their penalty area after releasing it, and before it has touched another player. (two-touch)
- Keeper Punts the ball during play
- Keeper after playing ball outside their penalty area, returns to their penalty area, and before it has touched another player, touches or plays ball with **ANY** part of their body.

### Team or keeper in possession of the ball in their *defensive half* commits any of the following offenses:

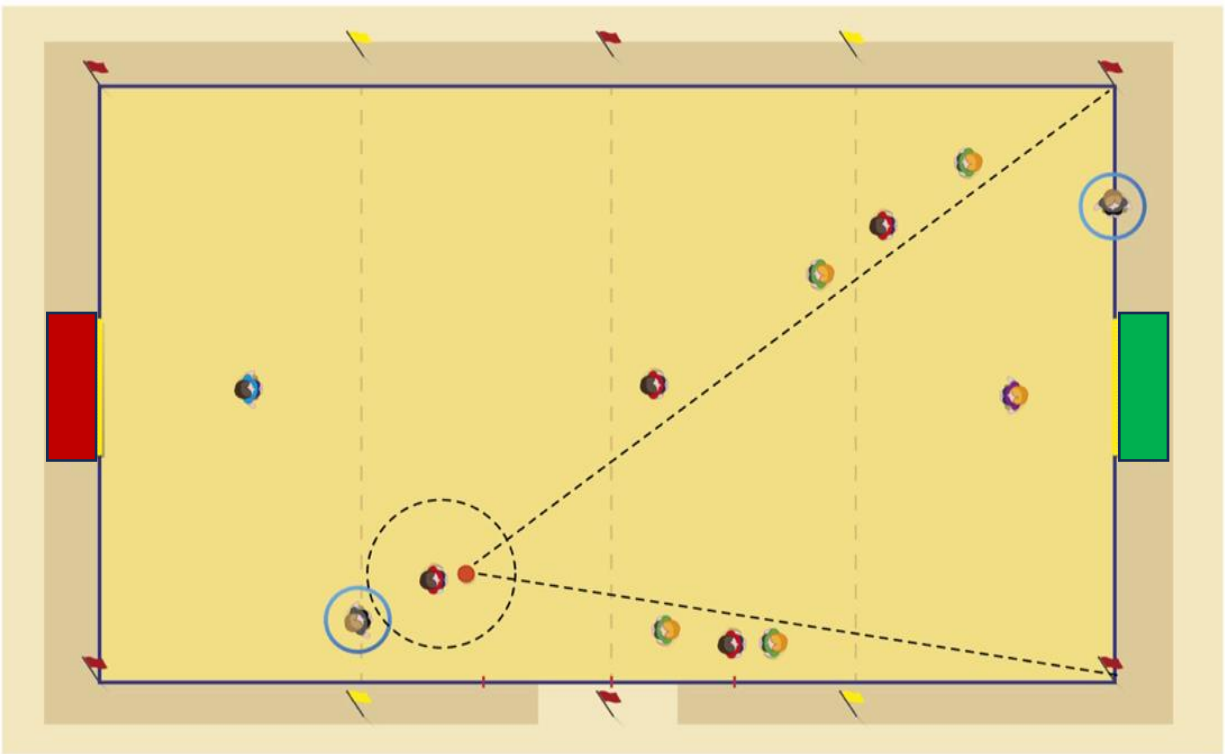
- Plays in a dangerous manner
- Impedes progress of an opponent without contact
- Simulation (foul or injury)
- Dissent or using offensive, insulting, or abusive language and/or action(s) or other verbal offenses
- Any other offense for which play is stopped to caution or send off a player
- A player, in their own half, commits against a **team-mate** any of the ten offenses (except deliberate handball) for which a penalty kick is awarded



## Offenses committed by attacking player in opponent's half

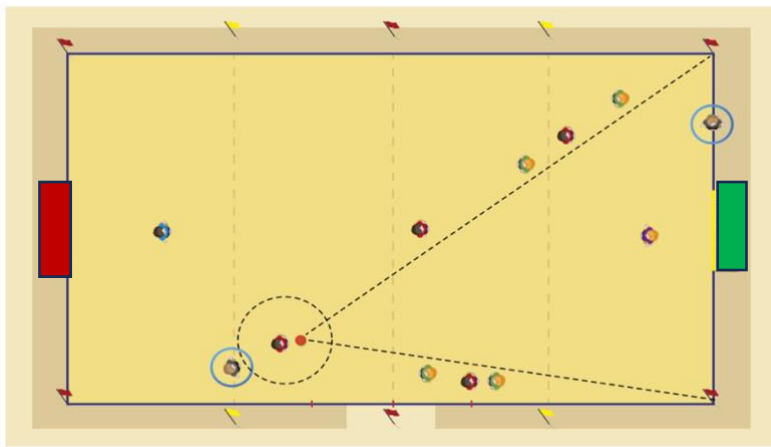
### Clear Zone (Cone) behind midfield line

- Plays in a dangerous manner
- Impedes progress of an opponent without contact
- Simulation (foul or injury)
- Dissent, using offensive, insulting, or abusive language and/or action(s) or other verbal offenses
- Prevents keeper from releasing the ball from the hands, or kicks or attempts to kick the ball when the keeper is in the process of releasing it
- Any other offense for which play is stopped to caution or send off a player

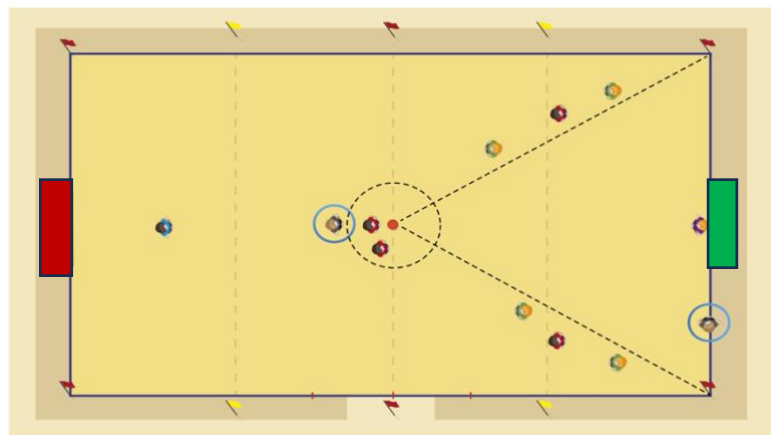


## Kicking team violation of a Free Kick Clear Zone

Once the ball is kicked and clearly moves, players are permitted to enter the clear zone, but if the **kicker** or their teammate touches the ball before it touches either the sand, goal frame, keeper, or the ball leaves the cone, the type of direct free kick awarded to the defending team is one of the following:



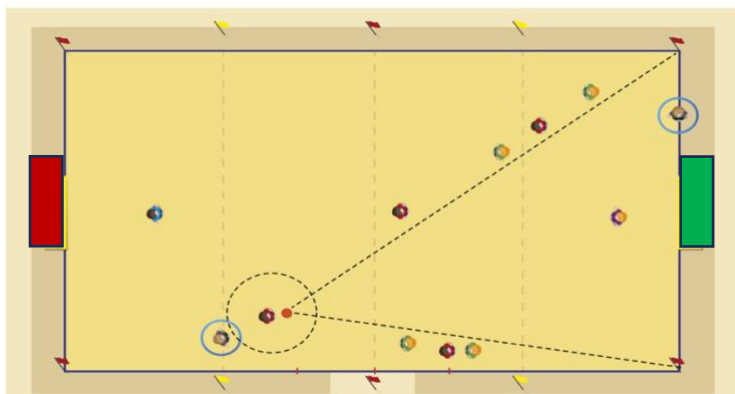
**Clear zone (cone) at the spot the kicking team touched the ball in their half**



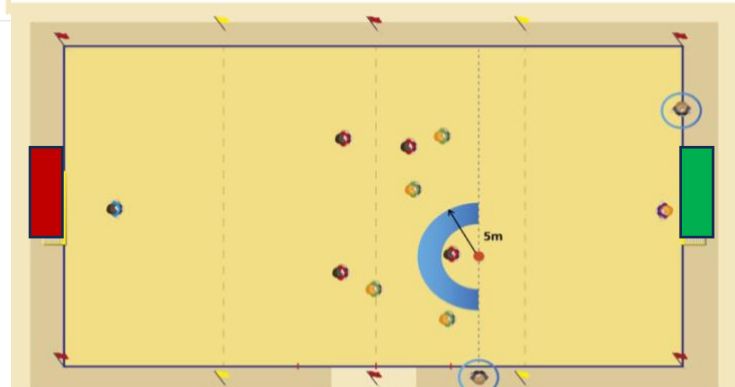
**Clear zone (cone) at midfield if the kicking team touched the ball in the defender's half**

## Defending team violation of a Free kick Clear Zone

Once the ball is kicked and clearly moves, the players are permitted to enter the clear zone, but if a **defender** touches the ball before it touches either the sand, goal frame, keeper, or the ball leaves the cone, the type of direct free kick awarded to the kicking team is one of the following:



Clear zone (cone) at the spot the defender touched the ball in the kicking team's half



Clear zone (No Cone) at the spot the defender touched the ball in the defending team's half



Penalty kick if a defender touched the ball within their own penalty area

# REFEREE SIGNALS

## 1. Signals by at least one of the referees



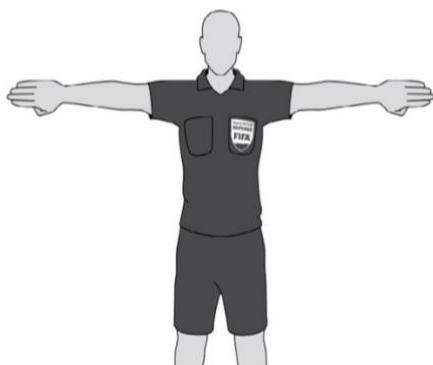
Kick-off/restart of play



Free kick from a team's own half  
or from the centre of the pitch



Penalty kick



Free kick from attacking half of the pitch



Kick-in/throw-in (Option 1)



(Option 2)



Goal clearance (Option 1)



(Option 2)



Corner kick (Option 1)



(Option 2)

## GOALKEEPER (restrictions and permissions)

- **NO PUNTING**
  - *If at a goal clearance - Warn keeper, retake, and continue 4-second count*
  - *If during play - Restart= Clear Zone (Cone) for opponent at midfield*
- Keeper can **not** score in **opponent's** goal, **directly** from **hands/arm**  
*(Violation = goal clearance for opponent)*
- Keeper can **not** play or dribble the ball outside their penalty area, then play or dribble the ball back into their penalty area and touch/play the ball with **any** part of their body before it has touched another player  
*(Violation = free kick for opponent with Clear Zone (Cone) at midfield)*
- Keeper **can** touch the ball in their own penalty area with their **hands/arms** if a team-mate plays the ball to them. However, once the keeper releases the ball back into play, they are **not permitted** to use their **hands/arms** a second time to receive the ball from a team-mate until an opponent touches the ball  
*(Violation = free kick for opponent with Clear Zone (cone) at midfield)*
- Keeper **taking** a **throw-in/kick-in** can use their **hands/arms** to then receive the ball from a team-mate if the keeper is in their own penalty area. However, they are **not permitted** to use their **hands/arms** a second time to receive the ball from a team-mate until an opponent has touched the ball.  
*(Violation = free kick for opponent with Clear Zone (cone) at midfield)*
- Keeper, while in their own penalty area, **can** use their **hands/arms** to receive a **throw-in/kick-in** from **either** team
- **KEEPER CHANGE**
  - Any **SUBSTITUTE** may change places without informing the referee or waiting for a stoppage in play
  - Any **PLAYER** may change places with the goalkeeper, but they must do so during a stoppage in play **and** inform the referee **before** making the change  
*(Violation = at next stoppage of play both players are cautioned)*

## **POSITIONING FOR ONE REFEREE**

- Referee should move along the touchline, and if they are positioned on the pitch, they should avoid interfering with play in the middle of the field unless there is a free kick or disciplinary action that requires the referee to be there
- Referee should be positioned behind and slightly beside the kicker for free kicks with a Clear Zone (Cone), so they may determine clear zone violations
- Referee should position themselves on the goal line for free kicks with Clear Zone (No Cone) as these types of kicks often lead to goals or close saves and the referee will be positioned to determine goal or no goal
- Move onto field to set up all free kicks
- Move as necessary along touch line to maintain the best view

Referee signal to track the goal keepers use of hands after receiving or saving the ball during play

### **(DOES NOT APPLY TO GOAL CLEARANCES)**

- Once the keeper uses their hands or arms to legally receive the ball from a teammate, the referee should indicate the first touch by extending their arm towards the direction of the keeper downward at a 45-degree angle until the ball is touched by an opponent or goes out of play, at which time the referee stops the signal.  
This signal will help the referee and the keeper track whether they are permitted to handle the ball in their penalty area from a pass from their team-mate

## **POSITIONING FOR TWO REFEREES**

### **General positioning during the match**

The referees must always face the pitch. One of the referees must be in line with the second-last member of the defending team or the ball if it is nearer the goal line than the second-last member of the defending team or, if necessary, level with the goal line.

i.e., When attacking play is moving toward the referee that is closest to the goal, they should move to the goal line for goal-no goal decisions. When the attacking play is moving away from the trailing referee, they should take a position in line with second to last member of the defending team.

### **Ball in-play situation**

Important: On all free kicks a referee needs to be positioned on the goal line because any free kick can lead to a goal. This position ensures accurate goal-no goal decisions.

Recommendations:

- The play should be between the referee and the second referee
- The referees should use a diagonal system, always keeping the ball and players in their field of vision
- Staying outside and parallel to the touch line makes it easier to keep the play and the other referee within the referee's field of vision
- One of the referees should be close enough to see play without interfering with it
- The referees only enter the pitch to restart play, after a foul has been committed, to conduct a dropped ball, to show a card, to assess an injury to a player, or in any other special circumstances
- "What needs to be seen" does not always happen in the vicinity of the ball.
- The referees should also pay attention to:
  - offenses in the penalty area towards which play is heading
  - aggressive off-the-ball individual confrontations involving players,
  - offense occurring after the ball has been played away



### **Goalkeeper releasing the ball**

One of the referees must take a position in line with the edge of the penalty area and check that the goalkeeper does not touch the ball with their hands outside the penalty area; while also counting the number of seconds they are in possession of the ball.

Once the goalkeeper has released the ball, the referee must take up a suitable position for supervising the match.

### **Referee signal to track the goal keepers use of hands after receiving or saving the ball during play**

#### ***(DOES NOT APPLY TO GOAL CLEARANCES)***

- Once the keeper uses their hands or arms to legally receive the ball from a teammate, the referee closest to the keeper should indicate the first touch by extending their arm towards the direction of the keeper downward at a 45 degree angle until the ball is touched by an opponent or goes out of play, at which time the referee stops the signal.
- This signal will help the referee and the keeper track whether they are permitted to handle the ball in their penalty area from a pass from their team-mate

### **“Goal – no goal” situations**

- When a goal has been scored and there is no doubt about the decision, the referee and the second referee must make eye contact
- If a goal has been scored, but the ball still appears to be in play, the referee who is nearest blows their whistle to attract the attention of the other referee.

### **Positioning in ball-out-of-play situations**

The best position is one from which the referee can make the right decision. All recommendations about positioning are based on probabilities and must be adjusted using specific information about the teams, the players, and events in the match up to that point.

- Positioning – kick-off
  - At the start of the match, the referee takes up a position on the goal line on the same side as the substitution zone, from where they watch to see if a goal is scored.
  - The second referee (opposite the substitution zone) takes up a position on the touch line opposite the substitution zone, ensuring that the defenders are in the correct position and using the 5 yd marks on the touch line to make sure that the defenders do not advance too far forward. They should then move to midfield to ensure kick is properly taken. They should then use the whistle to signal for the kick-off to be taken.
  - Once play has started, and at kick-offs, the referees may take up a different position on the touch lines as necessary for better control of the match.
- Positioning for clear zone (cone) free kicks
  - referee closest to kick should take position behind the kicker without interfering in order to see infringements of the clear zone. The other referee should take up a position on the goal line
- Positioning for direct free kicks
  - Referee closest to the location of free kick positions players and signals restart with a whistle.
- Positioning for kick-in/throw-in
  - Referee on the side of the field nearest this type of restart is to take a position on the touch line that keeps the player and ball between the referee and the goal being attacked.
  - The other referee moves to the second to last defender or the goal line, as necessary.